

Hegel's Philosophy of Religion



Bernard M.G. Reardon

Library of Philosophy and Religion
General Editor: John Hick

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In Memory of My Mother

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Biographical Note</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	xiii
1 The Early Theological Writings	1
(i) The Greek Ideal	1
(ii) Jesus and Kant	4
(iii) 'The Spirit of Christianity'	12
2 What Is Religion?	24
(i) The Marks of the Religious Consciousness	24
(ii) Religion and the Secular World	29
(iii) Religion and Philosophy	31
(iv) Philosophy as 'Understanding' and as 'Speculation'	35
<i>Appended Note on the Relation of Religion to Art</i>	37
3 The Main Types of Religion	38
(i) Religions of Nature	38
(ii) The Religion of Spiritual Individuality	50
4 The Absolute Religion: Christianity	58
(i) The Meaning of Revelation	58
(ii) Christian Dogma	65
(iii) The Church	71
5 Man's Knowledge of God	77
(i) The Question of Intuition	77
(ii) Hegel's Criticism of Jacobi and Schleiermacher	82
(iii) Can God's Existence be Proved?	88
6 Some Problems of Interpretation	100
(i) Theism or Pantheism?	100
(ii) Necessary Truth and Contingent Events	104
(iii) The 'Speculative' Treatment of Doctrine	113
(iv) The Diversity of Religions	119
References and Notes	123
Select Bibliography	142
Index	145

Preface

After long eclipse — in the English speaking world certainly — Hegel has today become a focus of attention on the part of both philosophers and historians of ideas, as the continuing flow of books and articles about him well testifies. Indeed a full bibliography of only the more recent publications would run to over a thousand titles. The basic reason for this is that the great German idealist, as is now justly realised, stands out as a key-figure in modern thought, upon which his influence, whether direct or indirect, whether through committed discipleship or from antipathy and hostility, is seen as pervasive. But Hegel is also very difficult to interpret, even indeed to understand; ambiguity permeates his thinking: 'Sein Wesen', it has been said, 'war Zweideutigkeit'. Moreover his attitude is polemical; he did not shrink from controversy and his often cryptic utterances have not ceased to provoke it. Finally there is the religious dimension of his philosophy which, in any serious study of him, cannot be ignored. On the contrary, it has to be faced even if, in a secularising age, it presents a stumbling-block.

My aim in the present volume is restricted to an account of Hegel's express treatment of the religious issue, mainly as comprised in the Berlin lecture-courses. These, it has to be remembered, Hegel never wrote out for publication and they do not make easy reading, being prolix, obscure and repetitious. To cope with them the student needs a guide, and this function I have endeavoured, within the space allotted to me, to provide. In particular I have sought to specify some of the main problems of interpretation and to indicate how hard it is to say definitively what Hegel's meaning truly was. The reader who,

fairly enough, expects of philosophers that they should be always clear and as far as possible concise, will most probably be deterred as soon as he is made aware of what faces him; yet it is this very element of ambivalence in Hegel — the *longueurs* have to be admitted — which renders the study of his works, for some minds at least, so fascinating. His merit, his admirers would say, lies not in the system itself, with its over-elaborate patterns, or in the train of his reasoning, which frequently lacks rigour, or for that matter in the soundness of his erudition, which can readily be faulted, but in the extraordinary perceptiveness of his insights. For what interested Hegel was, in the largest sense, the historic destiny of man, and upon this presiding theme he seldom fails to cast significant light.

BERNARD M. G. REARDON

Biographical Note

The son of a minor civil servant in the Duchy of Württemberg, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born at Stuttgart, 27 August, 1770. Schooled at the local *gymnasium*, he entered the Protestant seminary at Tübingen University in 1788, ostensibly with a view to the Lutheran ministry. But on leaving he took up work as a private tutor at Berne in Switzerland, where he stayed until 1796, after which he moved to a similar post at Frankfurt. In 1800 he was appointed *Privatdozent*, or unsalaried lecturer, at the university of Jena – fortunately by the death of his father he had inherited some small private means – where he had for a colleague his Tübingen contemporary and personal friend F. W. J. von Schelling, who by this time had already made his name as a philosopher. Hegel indeed reckoned himself a disciple of Schelling's, although it was not long before the divergence of his own views became increasingly apparent. His final break with Schelling came with the publication of his first major work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in 1807. His flight from Jena following Napoleon's victory and the occupation of the town by the French troops left him professionally unemployed until, through the good offices of his friend F. I. Niethammer, an official of the Bavarian ministry of education, he was appointed director of the Nuremberg *gymnasium*, although in the interval he was able to make a living for himself by editing a newspaper, the *Bambergerzeitung*. His Nuremberg post he held from 1808 to 1816, carrying out his headmaster's duties with signal conscientiousness and competence. In 1811 he married Marie von Tucher, of an upper-class Nuremberg family, by whom he had two sons and a daughter. The

following year saw the publication of the first two volumes of his *Science of Logic* (the third volume came out in 1816).

The fame which this work brought him led in 1816 to the offer of the chair of philosophy at Heidelberg, where he completed the exposition of his philosophical system with the publication in 1817 of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (2nd much enlarged ed., 1827; 3rd ed., 1830). A year later came his nomination to Fichte's vacant chair at Berlin, a position he was to hold until his sudden death from cholera in 1831. The Berlin professorship marks the period of his world-wide reputation as the foremost thinker in Germany. Moreover it was not only the teaching duties which occupied him; various administrative responsibilities had to be undertaken, and in 1829 he became rector of the university. Academic work, however, was relieved by travel and by the round of social engagements, which he always greatly enjoyed.

Introduction

Philosophy of religion, as distinct from religious or theological thinking of a philosophical type or temper, is a comparatively modern discipline. While its beginnings, that is, may be traced back to the age of Enlightenment and even beyond, it may be said to have established itself first with the appearance of Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* in 1793, then with Schleiermacher's *Discourses on Religion* in 1799, and finally with Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, published a year after his death, in 1832.¹ Of the three Kant's work still expresses clearly the spirit of the eighteenth century. His ideal is a rational and ethical religion, based on what he takes to be essential Christianity but purged of the elements which in his view had overlaid the original teaching of Jesus with a crust of legalism and superstition. For him the content of true religion is moral, the performance of our duties as commandments of God. Schleiermacher's *Discourses*, on the other hand, as a characteristic utterance of Romantic sentiment, find the essence of religion in feeling, of which religious doctrines are, so to speak, the reflective projection and moral practice the appropriate accompaniment. Hegel's work, however, think what one will of the metaphysic underlying it, goes far beyond that of either of his predecessors in setting out the plan of his subject as a whole and indicating the frame of mind — rational and scientific — in which its problems should be approached. A genuine attempt at a philosophy of religion must, he shows, be of sufficient scope to include not only Christianity but both primitive religion and the great historic religions outside Christendom, and to demonstrate that all of them in their

differing ways embody at least some of the principles of the intrinsic religious relationship and hence approximate in varying degree to that ideal expression of the religious consciousness which merits the designation *absolute*.

Today of course the philosopher of religion is very likely to envisage his task along other lines and to adopt altogether different methods. Nevertheless Hegel's achievement has, I believe, much more than a merely historical interest. It rests on the conviction that religion represents a universal attitude of the human spirit, of which the several world-religions are the variegated outcome. Hegel's generalisations may be hasty and sweeping, the result of his inadequate factual knowledge and excessive desire to categorise. But his extraordinary breadth of outlook and penetrating understanding cannot be questioned.

Religion as Hegel sees it concerns man's relation to the Absolute. It is not, he states, 'consciousness of this or that truth in individual objects, but of the absolute truth, of truth as the Universal, the All-comprehending, outside of which lies nothing at all'. He is therefore more interested in what it involves for human thought generally than in arguing for the truth of specific doctrines, and in this respect at any rate he resembles Schleiermacher and anticipates the modern standpoint. Thus he takes religion in its many and diverse traditions as a datum, a fact of human culture like art or morality, the positivity of which is disclosed in all its richness and variety only by historical investigation. It is this inexhaustible mine of knowledge, he holds, that provides the material apart from which philosophical study of the religious problem cannot profitably advance. The philosopher, that is, while not being himself a historian, must see to it that he makes all relevant use of the information with which the scholar can furnish him. Doubtless religion is so universal in scope that careful and sympathetic study of the beliefs and ideas characteristic of any one of the world's faiths will inevitably yield some understanding at least of what religion as such fundamentally is. Nevertheless the differences between religions are numerous and significant, and philosophical inquiry will fail in its object if it neglects to assign due weight to them. Hegel, we may claim, is the first to have realised the immense complexity of the problem with which religious phenomena confront the thinker whose aim is systematic interpretation at the highest level.

Religions, then, have manifestly a historic life of their own quite independent of any sort of philosophical questions as to their meaning and validity. Some may appear more philosophical in their self-expression than others, but religion itself is not philosophy and should never be confused with it. What the philosopher has to do is to try to understand the proper nature of religion before attempting to assess the rationality of its content. Certainly were he to make the mistake of treating religion itself only as a product of the reflective intellect it would be difficult to see what more could be implied by talking about a *philosophy* of religion. Yet the main objection which his critics have urged against Hegel's own treatment of religion is that he virtually equates it with philosophy and thus renders his own enterprise as a philosopher of religion superfluous. All the same, it is not his intention to confound the ways in which the Absolute, or the ultimate reality, is envisaged by religion and philosophy respectively. For religion, he is careful to point out, represents the Absolute *imaginatively*, whereas philosophy uses abstract categories. The distinction, he contends, is of prime importance, in that it recognises both the separate identity of religion and indicates the possibility of discussing it in the language appropriate to metaphysics. For if the philosopher's vocation is to comprehend all aspects of human experience there can be no doubt as to his duty of interpreting religion in his own terms.

That religions exist in their own right as original forms of human culture implies, however, that philosophy has only a limited range in providing any such interpretation. Metaphysics is not called upon to take the place of faith and worship in human life; otherwise the philosopher would be assuming the functions of the priest or the prophet. Nor should the metaphysician consider it his responsibility to prove the exclusive truth of any particular religious tradition or bolster up beliefs and doctrines which without philosophical support would probably collapse. If religion is to be justified at all it must be seen to contain its justification within itself. All that philosophy should try to do is to clarify what in religion is only implicit or obscure — to illuminate the way in which religious thinking moves, so to speak — while at the same time bearing in mind that it is an autonomous sphere of man's existence and that its imaginative vitality is the real source of its power over him.

Assuredly it is no business of philosophy, as Hegel himself insists, to endeavour to bring individuals to a religious commitment or even to persuade them that the only safe road to religion's goal is by philosophical understanding. 'What knowledge must do is to know religion as something which already exists. It is neither its intention nor its duty to induce this or that person, any particular empirical subject, to be religious if he has not been so before, if he has nothing of religion in himself, and does not wish to have.' Nonetheless, it is an understanding which can only serve to strengthen and deepen religious conviction.

Philosophical thought might however see it as its long-term aim to replace the historical religions by one which would be purely rational – a 'religion within the limits of reason alone', to adopt Kant's phrase. But in that case the philosopher must be ready to substantiate it in principle and to form a distinct idea of what it would involve in practice, since the danger is that by so doing he would only deprive religion of its authentic character and originality. And in fact Hegel's own project has, as I have said, been charged more than once with attempting something very like this. The question is of course an all-important one for the student of Hegel's religious philosophy, as it inevitably raises the issue of whether or in what sense the great German idealist can be said to teach anything resembling traditional theism. Yet we have to acknowledge that unlike many of the leaders of Enlightenment thinking he definitely considered himself not only a Christian but a good Lutheran Protestant, anxious moreover to leave no doubt of the fact in the minds of others. Further, he maintained that his own system comprised a metaphysical restatement of Christianity of a kind to enable it to give a finally satisfactory, because at last wholly intelligible, account of itself. Whether or not we conclude that in this Hegel was self-deceived we have surely to accept the sincerity of his intent and refrain from accusing him of erecting a mere facade of orthodoxy from fear of either state authority or public opinion. It is all too easy to misrepresent Hegel – after all, his precise meaning is often extremely difficult to grasp – and more than one aspect of his thought has had to suffer such misrepresentation from his critics. My concern in this brief study is much less to fathom the philosopher's motives or private beliefs than to understand his concept of

religion in the terms in which he himself elaborates it and to appraise it accordingly. An author, who sets out his views with such studied deliberation as did he, should be judged by what he actually says rather than by surmise as to what he might have said, had he been less circumspect.

For the content of Hegel's mature doctrine we shall have recourse to the magisterial *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.² But this is not by any means our only source, and other works both of his maturity and his early manhood will have to be referred to. For the religious problem was one to which he repeatedly returned, the answer he gave to it providing one of the main elements of his system.³ His entire metaphysic, or 'logic', may in truth be said to constitute an idealist interpretation of religion itself.

But before embarking on a detailed survey of Hegel's philosophy of religion as eventually developed by him it behoves us to take a look at the essays he drafted during his years as a private tutor first at Berne and then at Frankfurt-am-Main.

I The Early Theological Writings

(i) THE GREEK IDEAL

It is very doubtful whether Hegel seriously intended to embark on an ecclesiastical career. His attitude to the orthodox theologising of his teachers at the Tübingen Protestant seminary — the *Stift*, as it was usually called — was at best non-committal, and at the end of the four years he spent there he had become decidedly critical of traditional Christianity. His real interests were classics and philosophy. In any case it has to be admitted that his record at the *Stift* was in no way outstanding. The attention he gave to his curriculum studies never seems to have been more than half-hearted, although at school in Stuttgart he had been considered a model pupil. Yet it is now evident that by the time he reached the university he had attained an unusual degree of intellectual maturity for his age — he was commonly alluded to by his friends as the Old Man — and with the independence of judgment which this brought he found the conventional academic routine uncongenial, if not a waste of time. Nor could he discover much to admire in his teachers themselves, who struck him as unimaginative and uninspiring.¹

The inspiration he wanted came from his study of the history and culture of ancient Greece, and on this subject he readily confided his thoughts to paper. Thus in an early essay at the *Stift* he contrasts what he sees as the *natural* and unitary consciousness of the Greeks with the divided and *artificial* consciousness of the moderns; and this contrast was to continue to haunt his mind. He was oppressed by the sense of the 'alienation' and 'corruption' of the modern outlook, to which

Christianity itself, he judged, had so largely contributed, and it was only years later that he was able to proclaim the true superiority of the Christian consciousness because of its supreme quality of *inwardness*. But in the days of his youth it was the Hellenic ideal of life — or at least what he took that to have been — which commanded his enthusiasm. Thus one of his Stuttgart school essays that has survived deals with 'The Religion of the Greeks and Romans', and in it the concept of 'national religion' (*Volksreligion*), which was to dominate his thinking on the subject for a considerable time to come, is already adumbrated.² The Greek philosophers and their disciples, he argued, offer us 'far more enlightened and sublime concepts of the Godhead, especially in respect of man's dignity' than those entertained by most other peoples before or since. 'They taught that God gives to every man sufficient means and power to achieve happiness, and has so ordered the nature of things that true happiness is achieved through wisdom and moral goodness.'³ Indeed the more thoroughly Hegel studied the classics the more convinced he became of the excellence of the ancient Greek view of life compared with that of the moderns, and especially his fellow-countrymen.⁴ But the most significant composition of his Tübingen days is the paper to which its modern editor gives the title 'Folk Religion and Christianity'.⁵ The *Volksreligion* idea clearly fascinated him. He was unattracted by religion as a purely private concern and gauged its real value by its potentiality as an active social force — a cohesive, elevating ideal, popular and national in the best sense. Classical Greece possessed such a religion, and so presented, he believed, a model to his own age. For Greek religion appealed to the 'whole man' in the full context of his social existence.

It is inherent [Hegel writes] in the concept of religion that it is not mere science of God, of his attributes, of our relation and the relation of the world to him and of the enduring survival of all souls — all of this might be admitted by mere Reason, or known to us in some other way — but religion is not merely historical or rational knowledge, it is a concern of the heart, it has an influence on our feelings and on the determination of our will; partly because our duties and the laws make a stronger impression on us when they are presented to us as the laws of God; and partly because the

image [*Vorstellung*] of the sublimity and the goodness of God towards us fills our hearts with words and with a sense of humility and gratitude.⁶

The benefit of a *Volksreligion* is, he contends, to render the ideas of God and immortality a living reality in the conviction of an entire people, influencing their thoughts and actions alike, not simply by way of specific moral rules but to the elevating and ennobling of the national spirit and the preserving of it from degradation. Once more the Greek experience is seen most fully to embody this ideal, for here was a religion which operated as a force active within the life of a nation *as such*. By comparison what the young critic finds wanting in Christianity is a proper balance.

The principal doctrines of the Christian religion have indeed remained the same since the beginning, but, according to the circumstances of the time, one doctrine would be pushed completely into the shadows while another was specially emphasized, and placed in the limelight, and distorted at the expense of the eclipsed doctrine, being either stretched too far or restricted too narrowly.⁷

His object in composing the essay has been, he goes on to explain, not to investigate which doctrines most appeal to the heart or comfort the soul, but rather to inquire what institutions are requisite in order that the doctrines and the force of religion should enter into 'the web of human feelings, become associated with human impulses to action, and prove living and active in them — in order that religion should become wholly subjective' — i.e. not a matter simply of objective dogma (*fides quae creditur*), but one of the heart. Hegel's stress here is worthwhile noting, in view of the charge of excessive intellectualism so often brought against his later writings. In fact he states quite expressly that religion gains very little from the understanding, 'whose operations, whose doubts, are on the contrary more apt to numb the heart than to warm it'.⁸ Moreover Hegel's purpose is a good deal more than a mere academic survey of the past: he has his eye on the present, believing that the role of folk-religion is to create a *free* society, something which 'private' religion, concerned with the personal

values of daily life, is not equipped to do. Already the philosopher's mature standpoint is foreshadowed in this interesting relic of his *juvenilia*.

(ii) JESUS AND KANT

While at the *Stift* Hegel at first took little account of the publications of Kant, although the critical philosophy had become a keenly discussed subject there. However he did not ignore them, and in his second year he read through the *Critique of Pure Reason*, following this up with that on the *Practical Reason*. He then came to realise that the Kantian method would have to be assimilated and before long was an enthusiastic admirer of the new rationalism: indeed throughout his life he was to be conscious of a profound debt to the Koenigsberg master. The appearance of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* strengthened his already settled conviction that 'the aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is human morality', and when in the early summer of 1785, during his stay at Berne, he wrote his short 'Life of Jesus',⁹ he was by now entirely self-committed to the most rigid Kantian ethicism, as the essay itself reveals on every page, almost at times to the exclusion of the Greek ideals of spontaneity, balance and an unconstrained naturalness which he had hitherto so consistently extolled. Yet we may surmise that any tension between Kant's moralism and Greek idealism was more specious than real. Hegel believed unreservedly in the power of reason (*Vernunft*) and adhered to the view that the Greek interpretation of life was in fact the embodiment of a truly rational understanding of religion, such as, in his own way, Kant likewise had sought to offer. Furthermore, the latter had evinced a deep respect for the teaching of Jesus, so that for Hegel himself to have tried to present the Christian gospel in Kantian language is not especially remarkable. It might in fact be said that to do so was at that time almost mandatory for anyone who wished to distinguish the gospel's rational content — its essential message, presumably — from the adventitious forms in which it was originally couched.¹⁰

In setting about his work Hegel had no intention of altering the shape of the New Testament record, still less of rewriting it.

His purpose rather was to comment and interpret. To that extent he felt himself justified in putting words into Jesus' mouth which are not to be found in the gospels themselves. His concern, that is, is not so much with what Jesus might actually have said than with what he *did*, what he accomplished. It is this, he seems to be saying, which will lead us to a proper grasp of what Jesus *meant*. The result is unquestionably prosaic: a recent critic has complained that Hegel has evacuated the four gospels not only of religion but even of their poetry.¹¹ Yet any really careful elucidation of their meaning by competent modern scholarship is as likely as not to have precisely such an effect, however disappointing to the sensitive reader.

The principle on which Hegel proceeds is set forth in the essay's opening paragraph, and is an unabashed appeal to rationality, which the writer identifies with the Godhead itself. It is according to *reason* that the plan of the world in general is ordered, just as it is reason again which 'teaches man to recognise his life's vocation or unconditional purpose'. And he immediately goes on to say that among the Jews it was the apostle John — whom he of course assumes to be the evangelist — who restored to men a consciousness of their true dignity, as something not foreign to them but intrinsic — 'in their true self, not in their lineage, and not in the urge towards happiness'. 'The development of reason is the unique source of truth and peace of mind, which John perchance did not proclaim as belonging exclusively or exceptionally to him but which on the contrary all men could open up in themselves.'¹² Jesus himself is introduced as the personal fulfilment of his own gospel of reason. The inference to be drawn from this is that he is not to be understood as having been in any sense an ascetic, a solitary, a dissident or a man consciously detaching himself from the life of his times. It also follows that he claimed for himself no special status or authority which could have had such a consequence. That the miracles, when viewed in this perspective, can likewise be dispensed with will occasion the reader no surprise: to any man conditioned by the outlook and standards of the *Aufklärung* the miraculous element in the gospels was a stumblingblock easily removed. This is illustrated at the outset by the way Hegel treats the temptation-story. The figure of Satan plays no part in it, and the successive temptations as given in the Lucan account — two of them representing either

mastery over nature or independence of it, and the third (and most serious) the danger of pursuing courses incompatible with man's true interest and dignity — are regarded as the internal reflection of Jesus' own mind. Again, Hegel's gloss on Luke 9:1f — where Christ gives his disciples power and authority over devils and to cure diseases, as well as commissioning them to preach the Kingdom — is to the effect that 'Jesus sent his twelve apostles about this time to strive, as did he, against the prejudices of the Jews, who took pride in their name and lineage, which in their eyes was a greater glory, and which they prized more highly than the unique worth that ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) confers on man'.¹³ But what surely is surprising is that on the Christian miracle *par excellence*, the Resurrection, Hegel has nothing at all to say: for him the Passion narrative ends with the burial. No doubt he found it an obstacle to his constant attempt to moralise the gospel, but he naturally is most at ease with Jesus' actual teaching, even though he discounts the idea that it contained anything calculated to inspire a particular faith in himself. The essential characteristic of that teaching is, he holds, Jesus' concern with the *spirit* of the law as distinct from its mere letter, to which the Pharisees were so obdurately attached. But the Golden Rule worries him as a 'prudential' maxim which on the face of it is quite irreconcilable with the true requirements of morality as laid down by Kant.

Thus for the young Hegel Jesus had come to signify a purely ethical doctrine centred on the principles of man's moral autonomy and the absolute obligation of the moral law. Yet it was upon this very foundation that historically the Christian religion with its dogmatic supernaturalism had been erected. The inconsequence of this seemed to Hegel so blatant as to demand explanation, since it would appear that because of it Christianity was self-disqualified as a means of promoting genuine morality. His answer is to be discovered in his next major essay, known today under the title 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion', completed to all intents by the end of November 1795.¹⁴ The standpoint from which the author views his subject is presented unequivocally at starting:

Wholly and entirely in reference to the topic itself, I remark here that the general principle to be laid down as a foun-

dation for all judgments on the varying modifications, forms, and spirit of the Christian religion is this — that the aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is human morality, and that all the more detailed doctrines of Christianity, all means of propagating them, and all its obligations . . . have their worth and their sanctity appraised according to their close or distant connection with them.¹⁵

Jesus introduced no new moral teachings: his purpose was to give fresh meaning and point to those already established. But the effect of this was to cast the shadow of ambiguity over his own beliefs and attitudes, so that even among his followers he was misunderstood. Yet the general drift of everything that is recorded of him as having said is plain enough — ‘to restore to morality the freedom which is its essence’, in contrast to a mere system of usage. But this simple doctrine, calling as it did for renunciation, sacrifice and self-control, achieved little in face of a deeply-rooted national pride. Thus he suffered the distress of seeing the utter shipwreck of his plan, and was himself sacrificed in the end to ‘the hatred of the priesthood and the mortified national vanity of the Jews’. But one thing, Hegel believes, stands out clearly, and this is that Jesus could have had no intention whatever of founding a new positive religion based on authority. Yet in the course of history the faith of Jesus did become a positive, not to say authoritarian, religion. It must therefore be conceded, in accounting for the rise of Christianity, that external circumstances and ‘the spirit of the times’ have had a potent influence on the development of its actual form — a development which it is the business of the history of dogma to examine in detail. This particular task, however, is not, Hegel says, his own, which is rather to look for some general reasons which ‘made it possible for the character of the Christian religion as a virtue religion to be misconceived in early times and turned at first into a sect and later into a positive faith’,¹⁶ For if to create a sect was not in Jesus’ mind this certainly was the work of his disciples, who, though they may not have properly understood the meaning of his doctrine — they were only simple men with ‘no great store of spiritual energy of their own’ — had ‘by laborious learning’ acquired a ‘divine sense of them and certain formulas about them’. Their design was to maintain and transmit this tradition faithfully,

without adding to it or taking from it. And obviously if the religion of Jesus were to become a 'public' religion something of the sort was necessary. At this point Hegel contrasts the disciples of Jesus with those of Socrates. The former had left everything and followed their master. 'They had no political interest like that which a citizen of a free republic takes in his native land; their whole interest was confined to the person of Jesus.' Socrates' followers, on the other hand, had definite aims and pursuits of their own, as well as a due sense of their personal capabilities. Essentially they were independent of their teacher and wished to go their own ways. They loved Socrates indeed, but 'because of his virtue and his philosophy, not his virtue and his philosophy because of him'.¹⁷

The readiness with which a few Jews listened to Jesus and even became his devoted adherents seems, Hegel thinks, to have sprung from their growing belief that he perhaps was the Messiah and that he would soon reveal himself in all his messianic glory. Jesus could not forthrightly contradict them in this, since only on the basis of such a belief would they learn to accept his teaching; but his true purpose was to elevate these messianic expectations to the moral realm. Nevertheless the effect upon the disciples themselves was to concentrate their interest on his own personality. Another factor making for the same result was of course his miracles. General considerations as to the feasibility of miracle would not, Hegel considers, be to the point, which is that Jesus' deeds *were* miraculous in the eyes of disciples. 'Nothing has contributed so much as these miracles to making the religion of Jesus positive, to basing the whole of it, even its teaching about virtue, on authority.' A further step in the same direction was the dispatch of his followers upon a specific mission. This enterprise was to begin with only brief, and little enough could have done in the time to 'make any great conquest of virtue'. But the method adopted was suited in fact only to a positive faith, such as theirs was already becoming.

However, the real transformation began with the disciples' preaching of the resurrection-gospel.¹⁸ Henceforth even moral doctrines were rendered obligatory in a positive sense: not, that is, simply on their own account but as *commanded* by Jesus, so abandoning the inward criterion by which their necessity is properly to be established. Thus the religion of Jesus himself

was turned into 'a positive doctrine about *virtue*'. Not indeed that the establishment of Christianity as a 'public' religion was something absolutely to be deplored. Its adherents became zealous in conversion, if only because the conditions on which salvation depended could be expressed in a limited number of distinctive *credenda*: although in any case 'the individual holds his positive faith with all the more conviction the more people he sees convinced, or can convince of it'.¹⁹ So, then, Christianity was destined to spread ever farther; but it also became part of the fabric of civil society, to which religion is always necessary for the maintenance of morality. The state cannot of itself demand of its citizens that they should be moral. Doubtless it is its duty not to do anything to contravene or undermine morality inasmuch as the unpholding of morality is in its own interest. But the state cannot create institutions designed directly to promote moral living without making itself more or less ridiculous.²⁰ At all events men will submit to such institutions only if they trust them, and this trust must first be won — something which only religion can effectively compass. But in the process Christian morality has itself been externalised and institutionalised, for by joining the society of a 'positive' Christian sect a man assumes the duty of obeying its statutes

not because he has himself taken something for obligatory, good, and useful, but because he has left the society to decide these matters and recognised something as a duty simply and solely at another's command and on another's judgment. . . . By entering the Christian society the proselyte has transferred to it the right of settling the truth for him and assumed the duty of accepting this truth independently, and even in contradiction, of reason.²¹

Thus is Hegel brought to a subject which was always to absorb his attention, namely the true relation of religion, or the church, to the state. The institutionalising of Christianity into a quasi-political authority with coercive powers of its own has been the final stage in the 'positive' development of the original faith of Jesus.

The virtues which [the church] approved and rewarded were of the kind which the state cannot reward, and similarly the

faults it punished were not the object of the church's vengeance because they conflicted with the civil laws, but because they were sins against the divine commands. . . . The church did not put itself in the state's place or administer the state's jurisdiction: the two jurisdictions were quite distinct. What it did often enough try to do was to withdraw from the arm of the law anyone guilty of a civil offence who had acted in the spirit of the sect.²²

This, in Hegel's view, has been a calamity. Civil justice cannot be imported into the moral realm, where the sanctions of positive law have no relevance.²³ The state should exercise the means of coercion, although its overall moral aim is not in question.²⁴ The church, that is to say, must exist within the state purely as a voluntary association, membership of which is always subject to the requirements of a man's civil duties. The moral end which it serves to advance can only be achieved by appeal to moral motives; any attempt to force its doctrines upon the unwilling or to terrorise the imagination is morally self-defeating.

The danger, Hegel contends, is especially prevalent in the sphere of education. Here the state no less than the church has an indisputable moral interest. If a citizen dislikes the political order under which he has been brought up, he has, at least in a free society, the liberty to emigrate. But education by the church in the form of indoctrination might well have the effect of stultifying the reason and so depriving the individual of any real power of choice. It will have infringed the child's natural right to the free development of his faculties and brought him up as a slave instead of as a free citizen. Yet is a child to be educated without a positive faith of some kind, in the hope of thus leaving his eventual choice entirely unfettered? Such a course, Hegel suggests, would deprive not only the individual but the state itself of an all-important imaginative aid in the formation of the moral character.²⁵ How, then, is the dilemma to be resolved? His answer is that in the Protestant church, unlike the Catholic, moral training in a religious form can be imparted without enslaving the individual mind and will. While a child is being educated it is unable to exercise a free choice; responsibility must lie with his parents. But at the same time his development need not be restricted so long as the church

abjures both power and claim to subject its members to authoritarian control. *All* religious observance should be voluntary and the constitution of the church itself completely democratic, expressing the spirit not of hierarchic rule but of brotherhood in a common faith. 'The faith of every individual Protestant must be his faith because it *his*, not because it is the church's.'²⁶ Religious belief, in short, cannot be authoritatively demanded or embodied in a formulary to which a man is obliged to assent. Mere 'will to believe' is an impossibility. The most that a representative ecclesiastical council can legitimately do is to declare what the general faith of the congregation is; what it may not do is to define what it ought to be.

We should note that in the matter of religious education Hegel's concern is not with freedom of conscience, which he regards as a civil responsibility, but with the character and quality of religious faith in itself. This, to be really worth the name, must be a personal or 'subjective' faith, not an 'objective' one (i.e. a creed). Yet, as he ironically observes, 'every church holds that nothing in the world is so easy to find as the truth; the only thing necessary is to memorise one of its catechisms'; and the remainder of the essay is devoted to an attack on the accepted notion of belief as an affair of dogmas and official *credenda*.

'The Positivity of the Christian Religion' concludes with a passage (added in April 1796) in which the author seeks to adapt the Kantian terminology to his own purposes and in particular to reconcile Kant's doctrine of *Vernunft* with the ideals of Hellenism. He summarises his view in a few trenchant sentences. The fundamental error underlying the church's entire system is, he says, that it ignores the rights pertaining to each faculty of the human mind — above all the chief of them, reason; though 'once the church's system ignores reason, it can be nothing else than one which despises man. The powers of the human mind have a territory of their own', as Kant insisted upon in the interest of science.

This salutary separation has not been made by the church in its legislating activity, and centuries have still to elapse before the European mind learns to make and recognize the distinction in practical life and in legislation, although the Greeks had been brought to this point automatically by their sound intuition.

In Greek religion, or in any other whose basic principle is a pure morality, the moral counsels of reason, which are essentially subjective, are not treated as if they were the objective rules with which the understanding deals. What, however, the Christian church has done, has been the very opposite of this — taking the subjective element in reason and setting it up as a strictly objective rule.²⁷ But no man, Hegel maintains, can renounce in favour of any ecclesiastical authority the right to legislate for himself and be responsible to himself for the administration of his own affairs as they touch his conscience, because by the alienation (*Verausserung*) of conscience he would cease to be a man altogether.²⁸

(iii) 'THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY'

When we turn to the series of papers composed by Hegel during his Frankfurt period which make up the essay usually known as 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate' we seem to enter upon a different world of thought entirely.²⁹ The work we have just been considering belongs clearly to the age of Enlightenment, and the attitudes it expresses might well be those of Mendelssohn or Lessing as well as Kant. By contrast the later composition is quite evidently a product of nascent Romanticism — the new world of Schleiermacher and Hölderlin, of Fichte and Schelling. Its ethos and even its literary style have changed.

Hegel opens with a discussion of the spirit of Judaism, which he finds embodied in the figure of Abraham, who casts his shadow across his whole posterity. The earlier essay, as we have seen, had been for the most part an indictment of historic Christianity; now however the author's perspective is radically altered; the Christian religion emerges as a religion of singular moral truth and beauty, beside which Judaism appears as a harsh and loveless legalism. Of this Abraham is typical: the first act which made him 'the progenitor of a nation is a disavowance which snaps the bonds of communal life and love'.³⁰ And we are further told that the same spirit which impelled him to leave his kith and kin attended him in his encounters with foreign peoples throughout his life — 'the spirit of self-maintenance in strict opposition to everything'.³¹ This same attitude Hegel

traces throughout the subsequent stages of the biblical history. The Exodus from Egypt, for example, involved more suffering for the Egyptians than for the Hebrews supposedly oppressed by them – the latter go unscathed, ‘yet their spirit must exult in all the wailing that was so profitable to them’. Of the Mosaic legislation it can only be said that it fully inherited the spirit of its executor’s forbears. God, as the Hebrews conceived him, was everything, man nothing: Israel was merely his property. The Sabbath itself is symbolic of their slave-mentality – a day of idleness after six days of labour. Of the positive meaning of freedom, so well understood by the Greeks, they knew little if anything. Simply to maintain their life satisfied them, and they wished for no more. On the other hand the presence of their neighbours fired them with ‘the genius of hatred’, content only with their enemies’ extermination. Hegel notes that the Jewish law has really no conception in it of *truth*, and he cites Moses Mendelssohn’s dictum that what Judaism prescribes is not beliefs but only actions, thus leaving the reason free, whereas a revealed religion, as distinct from a revealed body of legislation, does not. In other words, the existence of God appears to the Jews not as a truth but as a command. Hegel’s comment is that the Jews are wholly dependent on God, and ‘that on which a man depends cannot have the form of truth’.³² How in fact should any people exercise reason and freedom who were only either mastered or masters? Hegel sweepingly concludes that the subsequent condition of the Jewish people, down to ‘the mean, abject, wretched circumstances in which they still are today, have all of them been simply consequences and elaborations of their original fate’.³³

It was against the background of this historic fate that Jesus made his appearance, and he set himself wholly to resist it. He himself was raised above it, and he tried too to elevate his people above it. But in this he failed utterly: enmities such as he sought to transcend ‘cannot be reconciled by love’. Nevertheless since Jesus did not align himself with any aspect of the Jewish religion his own was bound to find an eager reception, not, certainly, among his own people but in the outside world, among men who were in no way implicated in the fate of the Jews. Jesus’ opposition to Judaism was the opposition of love, his spirit the spirit of reconciliation. Love for him was not indeed the abrogation of the moral law, since it continues to

oppose what the moral law prohibits; but love has no part in the vindictiveness of punishment. The spirit of Jesus, a spirit which rises above morality (i.e. in the Kantian sense of the subduing of inclination by reason), is clearly revealed in the Sermon on the Mount — an attempt, illustrated by numerous instances, to strip the Jewish laws of their constricting legalism. 'The Sermon does not teach reverence for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfils the law and renders it superfluous'.³⁴ Kant's interpretation of the words 'Love God above all things, and thy neighbour as thyself' as an injunction that 'requires respect for the law which commands love' is stigmatised by Hegel as entirely wrong-headed. For in love all thought of *duty* vanishes: law and duty are extinguished in love.

From marking this contrast in Jesus' moral teaching with both the Mosaic law and Kant's ethicism, Hegel turns to consider love as the transcending of penal justice and the reconciliation of fate. So long, of course, as the law remains, so will punishment. 'But the living being whose might has been united with the law, the executor who deprives the trespasser in reality of the right which he has lost in the concept, i.e. the judge, is not abstract justice, but a living being, and justice is only his special characteristic.'³⁵ Although, therefore, punishment for evil doing is inevitably deserved, the execution of it is *not* inevitable — a condition that fails to satisfy justice whilst law is paramount.

Reconciliation with fate is, Hegel admits, more difficult to conceive than reconciliation with penal law. But fate differs from punishment in that what we mean by it is nothing other than life itself *viewed in a certain way*. A man cannot evade or escape his fate, because no law is invoked. Punishment can be withheld, but the retribution brought by life itself cannot; one is bound to take the consequences of one's actions.

When a trespasser feels the disruption of his own life (suffers punishment), or knows himself (in his bad conscience) as disrupted, then the working of his fate commences, and this feeling of a life disrupted must become a longing for what he has lost. The deficiency is recognized as a part of himself, as what was to have been in him and is not.³⁶

But the longing for recovery of what has been lost is in itself a

first step towards that recovery. Opposition marks the possibility of reconciliation, and the degree to which, in affliction, life is felt as an opposition is also that of the possibility of resuming it once again. And this sense of the rediscovery of life is, according to Hegel, *love*. It is by love that fate is reconciled. Why he has now come to favour this term so much is because of its width of meaning — the very reason, incidentally, for Kant's distrust of it. It ranges from sexual desire to a selfless readiness actually to forgive one's enemies. Furthermore, love can even reconcile the innocent to their undeserved fate — something of which Jesus himself provides the supreme example.

Indeed love, Hegel maintains, is nothing less than the principle of all virtue. 'To complete subjection under the law of an alien Lord, Jesus opposed not a partial subjection under a law of one's own, the self-coercion of Kantian virtue, but virtues without Lordship and without submission, i.e. virtues as modifications of love.'³⁷ Pure love was the motive of Jesus' own action, and it explains why his virtue is unique. But because his forgiveness was absolute — on the cross itself he forgave his crucifiers — Jesus set himself above fate, an act which, although in itself morally splendid, meant his actual withdrawal from the very relationships in and by which life is realised. Thus in a deeper sense the freedom which he achieved — a freedom, that is, from the limiting and conditioning experiences normal to life — was itself an injury to life, though not of course through any intent of his. His fault, one may say, was 'the guilt of innocence' (*der Schuld der Unschuld*). All the same the injury was there, and Jesus, 'perfect soul' though he was, could not avoid responsibility for it. His attitude being thus one of withdrawal, a relinquishing of every particular aim and commitment, the world of finite ends had no claim upon him and he was reconciled to it. But this did not prevent every man's hand being against him. Religious authority and civil, Pharisee and Sadducee, all alike ranged themselves in opposition to him. Yet it was only in a religion of unrestricted love and self-sacrifice that he could find satisfaction. To him this was the Kingdom of God.³⁸

But, Hegel observes, we have still to consider whether this really does satisfy nature or whether Jesus' disciples were impelled by any need for something beyond it.

Is there an idea more beautiful than that of a nation (*Volk*) of men related to one another by love? Is there one more uplifting than that of belonging to a whole which, as a whole, as one, is the spirit of God, whose sons the individual members are? Was there still to be an incompleteness in this idea, an incompleteness which would give a fate power over it? Or would this fate be the nemesis raging against a too beautiful endeavour, against an overleaping of nature?³⁹

So Hegel arrives at his final consideration — '*the fate of Jesus and his Church*.'⁴⁰ Between a society which knows no relation except what proceeds only from a disinterested love and one held together by a nexus of civic relations rooted in property there can be, he argues, no real connection: they exist upon two altogether different planes. Hence because of the 'impurity' of social life as Jesus knew it he could carry the Kingdom of God only in his heart, entering into relations with men for the sole purpose of training them and developing in them that spirit of goodness which he believed was in them and thus creating a band of men whose own world would be identical with his. Consequently even 'beautiful' relationships within the framework of ordinary political and social life had perforce to be surrendered if the ideal of purity was to be attained. Unhappily it could be realised only in a void: in Jesus' own case in personal isolation, even from his mother, brothers and kinsfolk. Hence his personal fate was to suffer from that of his people: 'Either he had to make that fate his own, to bear its necessity and to share its joy, to unite his spirit with his people's, but to sacrifice his own beauty, his connection with the divine; or else he had to repel his nation's fate from himself, but submit to a life undeveloped and without pleasure in itself.'⁴¹ Jesus chose the latter course, severing himself from all the interests of this world and demanding a like attitude in his disciples. The result however was inevitable, for the latter, in opposing the corruption of their environment, compromised their own incorruption by a divided consciousness — something the possibility of which Jesus had himself recognised when he said 'I am come not to bring peace on earth, but a sword'. So the earthly life of Jesus was one of separation from the world and eventual flight from it into heaven.

Yet Jesus' own destiny was not entirely shared by the

community of his followers. These formed a group and were able to sustain a group life apart from the world only to a qualified degree. Their outlook was less negative, less a matter of active opposition, and more one of positive love for each other, even though their fundamental antagonism to the world remained. But when love is extended over an entire community its character changes; it ceases to be a living union of its individual members and its enjoyment is restricted to the consciousness of their mutual love. But although this love is 'a divine spirit' it still falls short of religion in any clearly visible sense, because in order to become a religion it must be able to manifest itself in an objective form. A mere feeling, however elevated, is not in itself enough; it must be fused, so to speak, with the universal, with what is communicable as a rational idea. 'The need to unite subject with object, to unite feeling, and feeling's demand for objects, with the intellect, to unite them in something beautiful, in a god, by means of fancy, is the supreme need of the human spirit and the urge to religion.'⁴² But — so Hegel contends — this urge was not satisfied in the primitive Christian community, because its belief in God amounted to no more than an expression of a common emotion. In a deity who is truly universal — a god of the *world* — all men are at one, so that a particular community *set apart* for his worship would be a contradiction. Jesus' religion demanded wholeness indeed, but the wholeness of total opposition to the world. The fellowship, on the other hand, which came to bear his name was, in practice, increasingly able to adjust itself to the world around it and so to pursue its own way of life as a community held together by ties of love. Its God, in other words, was really the God of the fellowship itself, a divinity manifesting precisely that exclusive love which is the fellowship's own character and the bond between one member and another. The common life of the first Christians, grounded as it was in a shared faith and hope finding its bliss in the 'pure single-heartedness of love', was itself an earthly reflection of the Kingdom of God, an embodiment of it on a small scale. Yet it has to be repeated that love of itself does not constitute religion; at least not until it can objectify itself in some apprehensible shape which alone can bring about a synthesis of knowing and feeling. 'Otherwise there remains in relation to the whole of man's divisible nature a thirst too slight for the

infinity of the world, too great for its objectivity, and it cannot be satisfied.⁴³

With Jesus' death his followers were as sheep without a shepherd, since by it their hopes for the liberation of Israel were shattered. It is true that they clung tenaciously to his memory, and no doubt in time would have yielded to the intuition of his divinity. But in this case the recollection of his vanished existence would, although lingering on, have lacked substance. What really was needed, if mere longing were to turn into religion, was some concrete image of the divine. And this need was met by the resurrection, for the risen Lord afforded exactly that — a *living image*. Hegel remarks, by the way, that to concern oneself with Jesus' resurrection as an actual event is to adopt the standpoint of the historian, which has nothing to do with religion as such. Belief or disbelief in the resurrection as a sheer fact independent of its religious significance is a purely intellectual matter, and 'to have recourse to the intellect means to abstract from religion'. It is plain enough, I think, that Hegel himself does not regard the resurrection as an historical happening. For this image belongs to the realm of the objective, and hence is something with which the scientific reason can properly deal. So Christ came to represent a divine being who is 'midway between heaven's infinity, where there are no barriers, and earth, this collection of plain restrictions'. It was from the dualism thus posited that there arose the idea of the two 'natures', divinity and humanity combined, a combination over which 'for so many centuries', Hegel wryly observes, 'millions of God-seeking souls have fought and tormented themselves.'

He is convinced, however, that the retention in the Christian community's memory of the human individuality of Jesus as the focus of all piety and worship was a profound mistake. The risen Christ is properly a divine figure; he is not of this world and not, therefore, to be conjoined in thought with that of the man his disciples had once known personally in day to day intercourse. Yet this earthly figure was emotionally necessary to them as the symbol of their mutual love — the only symbol in fact available to them. They had rejected 'life' with its natural relationships as the sphere of their self-fulfilment, but they still needed some criterion for their ideal love if it was to be actualised among them. 'Love itself did not create a thorough-going union between them, and therefore they needed another

bond which would link the group together and in which also the group would find the certainty of the love of all.' Christ, surviving still in his resurrected earthly personality, thus sufficed to express their love in objective form; but there were no living activities in which the spirit could otherwise embody itself. Their remembered Lord was the sole end to which their thoughts and hopes could be directed, and apart from the exercise of their mutual love they could do nothing but preach him as 'the Gospel'. The only life they could ever expect to live – since life in this world, with its inevitable 'impurity', was not open to them – was one hereafter, in heaven. The whole meaning of religion was reduced to a yearning for what could not in the nature of the case become a historic reality. Thus they were divided between nostalgia for the past – 'Christ crucified' – and a longing for some transcendental future when love would be all in all. The early church failed because it sought only to follow its master in his flight from the world as it is and cannot but be. Like him it was fated to embrace 'fatelessness'; like him it separated its ideal from the only forms in which it could ever be properly manifested. The church and Christ, that is to say, were simply identified, and because this deified man remained everlastingly in their consciousness religion for them became a perfected life.⁴⁴ Moreover in all the succeeding forms which Christianity has assumed over the ages this same contradiction has persisted. The divine is present only in some higher consciousness and never in ordinary life itself. This is true even when the church 'enjoys the actuality of the most multiplex consciousness and unites itself with the fate of the world', for then God is thought of as necessarily opposed to that fate. We see it in both Catholic asceticism and Protestant pietism, which alike secure their righteousness at the expense of the the world and its concrete social being. But as history now reveals, the result has been 'that church and state, worship and life, piety and virtue, spiritual and worldly action, can never dissolve into one'.

The 'Life of Jesus' and 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion' each attempt to express the essential meaning of Christianity in terms of the Kantian ethic. The essay we are now considering, however, abandons the Kantian standpoint in favour of one that discovers the spring of Christ's religion in an all-reconciling because wholly self-sacrificing *love* – a sublime

ideal, taken in itself, but one doomed to failure because entailing in the end only flight from the world and abnegation of the forms in which alone life can be affirmed and its potentialities actualised. In fact Hegel's mind in this matter was still determined by his ideal of a *Volksreligion* as typically embodied in the ancient Greek city-state. Such a religion, he had noted back in the summer of 1793, 'must be so constituted that all the needs of life – the public state activities (*Staats-handlungen*) – are tied in with it'.⁴⁵ Religion, in other words, must at once be a reflection and a consecration of the organically structured life of man in society. It was this which had gripped Hegel's imagination from his student days and was to hold it firmly until the last. Greek religion was grounded in 'universal reason' – the basic criterion by which, in his judgement, a genuinely national religion may be identified, although it also satisfied 'fancy, heart and sensibility', which likewise must not be permitted 'to go empty away'. But it was the demands of life as met in the 'public state activities' which provided the final and exhaustive standard. And by it, Hegel still believed, Christianity in its finer essence and spirit could only be deemed wanting. What it could not do, that is – and what a religion ultimately worthy of the name will do – is to develop in man a full rational consciousness. Christianity was at bottom an individual and private affair, and a vast deal of what constitutes the active life of men within the body politic was totally ignored by it, when not expressly devalued and renounced. With the possible exception of traditional Catholicism it failed even to satisfy the natural requirements of the imagination, leaving the believer only 'sad and melancholy'.⁴⁶

So with these two extended but contrasting essays behind him Hegel now conceived it his task to show how Christianity could become a true *Volksreligion*. One of the conditions – namely, its basis in universal reason – it could meet, he felt, without too great difficulty. But some difficulty certainly would be encountered, for the actual forms of Christian belief are largely constituted by an imaginative symbolism which has itself acquired the force of authority. Could reason come to terms with this? Only, it would seem, if rational insight were substituted for authoritative direction. Yet can society be unified only on the basis of shared beliefs and sentiments? Action can be outwardly identified, assessed and regulated, but

personal conviction is much less easily determinable and in any case has proved itself a fruitful cause of sectarian divisions. But need a national religion be embodied only in a single institution? Should it not be able to contain a diversity of sects within itself? Hence the problem resolves itself into that of church and state. Jesus admittedly had no such relationship in mind, but the consequence was that his followers set up a kind of state within a state, a self-contained corporate whole, save that it was wanting in the intrinsic authority with powers also of compulsion which the state itself possesses. Thus the Christian church found itself caught up in a dilemma: if personal conviction is all-important and unity by coercion illegitimate how can credal anarchy possibly be avoided? On the other hand, if uniformity of belief is to be imposed by force disruptive 'heresy' becomes the paramount evil and freedom of thought cannot survive.

It remains to mention the fragments of an essay — two sheets of manuscript alone survive out of an original forty-seven — composed in the year 1800 that are of some interest.⁴⁷ For in it Hegel seems to have been dealing with the same sort of issues as had occupied him in 'The Spirit of Christianity', particularly the problem of reconciling opposites — the eternal and the temporal, God and man, subject and object, the individual and the collective. Take the last, for example.

The concept of individuality [we read] includes opposition to its infinite variety and also inner association with it. A human being is an individual life in so far as he is to be distinguished from all the elements and from the infinity of individual beings outside himself. He exists only in that the totality of life is divided into parts, he himself being one part and all the rest the other parts; and he again exists only inasmuch as he is no part at all, and nothing is separated from him.⁴⁸

Reflection, or the analytical reason, that is, must insist on this distinction, but in doing so is unable to find the means of uniting what is necessarily separated in thought. Yet life is larger than thought, and it is in life that the principle of union must be looked for. Hegel had had recourse to this idea already, as I have said, but he now seems to have made it more specific by presenting it in organic terms. An organism is a unity, but its

ability to function depends on its parts – whence, however, contradiction arises. Further, an organism is itself a part of something greater – ultimately indeed the entire universe or ‘Nature’. How then can the whole and the parts, the universe and the endless multiplicity of the objects composing it, be understood as in reality *one*? It is an ancient problem which recurs ever and again. For the young Hegel his deepening sense of the vital unity of all things – and his esteem for Schelling’s philosophy was at this time at its height – it could not be evaded; his mind was dominated by it. He cannot therefore but fall back upon religion, for the passages which have been connected by their editor into a ‘Fragment of a System’ are clearly portions of yet another theological essay. Reflection, which analyses, separates and defines, cannot rise to the level of religion, which alone has the power of grasping the whole as a living spiritual reality: a reality Hegel unhesitatingly identifies as God. For God is spirit, ‘the living unity (*Einigkeit*) of the manifold in contrast with the manifold as its embodiment (*Gestalt*), not in contrast with it as separated, dead, bare multiplicity’.⁴⁹ (‘The spirit is an animating law in union with the manifold, which is then itself animated.’) So when man sees this animated manifold as a multiplicity of individuals bound together by a single informing spirit, their separate lives become organs and the infinite whole an infinite totality of life. And when, further, he sees this infinite life both as the spirit of the whole and as a living being outside his own limited ego, and so seeing it, transcends this limited, personal ego by rising to the living being of the Whole, then, says Hegel, he worships God. Religion, in short, is the self-elevation of finite life to the infinite.

At this stage of his intellectual development Hegel is still not able to understand ‘spirit’ as essentially reflective thought or ‘reason’ (*Vernunft*), words which continued to retain for him mainly their Kantian signification. Thus he prefers as yet to employ the term *life* as carrying a meaning nearer to his Hellenic ideal. Reason and life are reconcilable – are indeed, he believed, basically one. But at this earlier stage philosophy and religion are contrasted. When at last the reconciliation of life and reason was achieved philosophy assumed for him the all-comprehending role previously assigned to religion. On the completion of his logical system, therefore – and with the

publication in 1807 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*⁵⁰ this was in all essentials to be attained – they appear in an entirely different light.

2 What is Religion?

(i) THE MARKS OF THE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

The primary task confronting the philosopher of religion is to identify the object of his study as clearly as he can. He must ask himself what exactly religion is and what are its constituent elements. This, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel undertook to do with all the intellectual concentration characteristic of him, along with a maturity of judgment which prompted the work's posthumous editor, Marheineke, to describe it as 'the highest bloom' of its author's philosophy. Thus much of the first part of it is taken up with a searching discussion of the main features of the religious outlook, in which this is contrasted with every other area of human concern. It would of course be idle to deny that the way in which Hegel deals with the subject — in terms, that is, of the ever-evolving Idea — is determined by his own metaphysical principles; but so long as the fact is kept firmly in mind the reader can avoid the not infrequent mistake of assuming that the resulting treatment only misrepresents the issues. No account of so complex a matter as religion can be detached from presuppositions of one sort or another, and it is best to be able to locate their presence at the outset and deliberately allow for them.

In determining the nature of religion Hegel begins straight away with the concept of God, the Absolute, in whom the truth of all things has its source; for in so far as religion is knowledge of God it is and must be absolutely true knowledge. It can be claimed therefore that it is God whom man seeks in his every

activity, since only in the infinite will he finally attain satisfaction. But the essential character of *religious* activity is that in it man explicitly recognises this to be so. Indeed the description of the religious consciousness with which Hegel opens his work is of such eloquence as to make it worth quoting at length. Religion, he says,

is the realm where all the enigmas of the world are solved, where all the contradictions of deeper-reaching thought have their meaning unveiled, and where the voice of the heart's pain is silenced – the realm of eternal truth, eternal rest, eternal peace. . . . All the manifold forms of human relations, activities and pleasures, and all the ways in which these are intertwined; all that has worth and dignity for man, all wherein he seeks his happiness, his glory and his pride, finds its ultimate centre in religion – in the thought, the consciousness and the feeling of God. Thus God is the beginning of all things. As all things proceed from this point, so do all return to it again. He is the centre which gives life and quickening to all things, and which animates and preserves in existence every form of being. It is through religion that man places himself in relation to this centre, upon which all other relations concentrate, . . . and is elevated to the realm of the highest freedom – one which is its own end and aim. . . . All nations know that it is in their religious consciousness that they possess the truth, and always they have regarded religion as constituting their true dignity and the Sabbath of their life. Whatever awakens doubt and fear in us, all sorrow, all care, all the restricted interests of finite life, we here leave behind upon the shores of time. And as from the highest peak of a mountain, far distant from all narrow earthly sights, we look down calmly upon every horizon of the landscape and of the world, so man with his spiritual eye, when lifted above the harsh realities of this actual world, contemplates it as something having only the semblance of existence, which, seen from this pure region and bathed in the light of this spiritual sun, merely reflects back again its shades of colour, its varied tints and hues, softened away into eternal rest. In this realm of the spirit flow the streams of forgetfulness wherefrom Psyche drinks and wherein she drowns all sorrow, whilst the dark things of life are softened

away into a dream-like vision, becoming gradually transfigured until no more than a framework for the brightness of the Eternal.¹

Such, Hegel states, is 'the general view, sentiment, or consciousness of religion', whose nature it is the object of his inquiry to observe, examine and understand.

The ground of this supreme satisfaction and inward certitude is *faith*, which in its simplest form is untroubled by obstacles and doubts of any kind. Nor is it confined to some uniquely privileged area of life, but extends its influence over the whole of a man's feelings and actions, so that nothing about him appears to be unrelated to this divine power but must derive from it as its only fount. Moreover the sense of divinity is not something man has had to discover for himself; it comes to him as it were from outside and beyond himself. In a word, it is *revealed*, and as such is received by him with complete trust, being as a rule communicated from an authoritative tradition represented in the first instance by his parents and teachers. Plainly the actual content of such simple faith may be greater or less; emphasis may even be largely on subjective emotion, leaving the object of faith only vague and remote. Hegel is here of course speaking of faith at its most naïve: if the science of religion is to be limited to statements like 'God is feeling' it is not, he thinks, worth having, and in fact it would scarcely be possible to understand how theology, as rational thinking about religion, should ever have come into existence at all.² (This, as we shall see later on, is the gist of Hegel's case against Jacobi.) on the other hand, and in complete contrast, faith may have a rich and varied content, covering both historical events interpreted as revelatory and theological doctrines which the church has defined authoritatively and which the believer therefore must accept at least implicitly. Unlike Kant, Hegel approves of such an articulated and dogmatic faith, and the strength of Christianity in his eyes is that it possesses a far ampler intellectual content than any other religion.³ It is evident, however, that between the intellectualism of Christianity and a religion of mere feeling there are many gradations, and in any case if the word 'faith' is to be employed at all it must necessarily imply an object of some kind. Otherwise the word itself would have no significance.

Nevertheless Hegel does not intend that faith should be taken to mean no more than intellectual assent to abstract statements. On the contrary, religion is a life, the driving force behind all that the genuine believer senses, thinks and does. This clearly is so where faith retains its original character of simple assurance, having never felt itself challenged or called upon to be self-explanatory or apologetic. But innocence cannot persist indefinitely, and many factors conspire to bring it to an end — recognition of the fact of sheer unbelief or of the existence of quite different religious traditions, or of the particular objections and criticisms which might be brought against the believer's own faith, even by those who in general share it, not to mention the all too common discrepancy between professed principles and actual practice. Hence the believer is led to realise that his faith is no longer immune to question and that strength of personal conviction alone is not enough to authenticate the truth of teachings familiar from childhood.⁴ The resulting condition is one of spiritual disquiet; the old confidence having been eroded everything may come to seem doubtful, since once difficulties are felt it is impossible either to dismiss them entirely or to admit them with only a part of one's mind. Yet as soon as the problem is faced — and a deeper understanding of the nature of religion itself will be of prime help in this regard — it may well be found possible to build faith upon a more secure basis. For now it will have become *reflective*, awake to its true status as one of the highest functions of the human spirit.

The reality to which faith reaches out may be designated by the name 'God', or by expressions such as 'the Absolute' or 'the Universal in and for itself'; various terms may be used and which of them one selects does not greatly matter. To the believer this reality is wholly transcendent — apart from, above, beyond and outside time and space. For God in his infinity and eternity so completely surpasses all that we ourselves are that our attitude, when we consciously turn our thoughts towards him, can only be one of fear and trembling. All the same the emotion thus experienced is one also of attraction, even of desire for union. And this it is which finds utterance in *worship*. For in the cultus, says Hegel, 'God is on one side, I am on the other; and the essential characteristic here is that I enclose myself with God within myself, know myself in God as my truth, and God in me'.⁵ Worship may take many differing

forms, but always as a means of bringing the devotee into relation with God, of establishing a mode of communion with him and of strengthening his own confidence that as a suppliant he will be found acceptable before God.

This union of God and man in worship is for the latter salvation, the great end which the religious life is thought of as serving, however diverse the actual expectations to which it may give rise. That man himself has a part to play in realising his salvation he usually of course recognises; yet basically it is something he feels granted him only by divine grace — a condition which demands of him the appropriate attitudes of humility and receptivity, heightened by a sense of his own unworthiness.⁶ But the real significance of worship, we should note, is that it is *intrinsic* to religion, is of its very essence, so that the divine reality to which the *cultus* links a man constitutes the fundamental truth for him here and now. Yet at the present time, Hegel points out, it is considered above all necessary to bring faith to man, as if religion has somehow first to be *made* for men. 'Oh, unhappy age', he exclaims, 'which must content itself merely with being continually told that there is a God!' — because in actual worship the truth is already presupposed. To the genuinely religious man talk about *proving* divine existence is an irrelevance.

But the believer, for all the intensity of his personal experience, is not an isolated individual. No doubt the founders of religions, or those who, like the Hebrew prophets, have from time to time revived religion, do possess a sense of the divine presence in a high degree personal to themselves, and in any case in the final resort religion is and must be a personal matter. Indeed it is evident that even when the individual's own experience is still largely submerged in that of his group his individuality as such remains a necessary factor, while in the higher religions individual responsibility is emphasised as a cardinal principle. Further, death itself is viewed in most religious traditions as perhaps the all-important moment in the soul's course and one which the individual must perforce endure alone, since a man's passing from the world is a journey he can share with no companion. Nevertheless, even when the truth of this is realised, the fact stands that religion is no less a social than an individual phenomenon. All history testifies to it. Religious rituals are types of *group* activity, just as religious

beliefs are not mere private opinions but the expression of a common mind, a received tradition of thought.

The result has been the historical growth of religious institutions of all kinds, the heart of which in every instance is a particular way of apprehending the divine. God, or the Absolute, attains for Hegel self-knowledge only in the human spirit, collectively and individually. As he himself puts it, religion is the divine spirit's knowledge of itself through the mediation of the human spirit. What man's worship signifies is an approach to and communion with the divine reality which is most fully and typically achieved in the shared experience of the religious community as a whole.

(ii) RELIGION AND THE SECULAR WORLD

But the religious consciousness is only one aspect of man's concern in life, and in fact has come to be very clearly distinguished from his other activities.

Man has in his ordinary secular life a number of working days during which he occupies himself with his own special interests, with worldly aims in general, and with the satisfaction of his needs; and thus he has a Sunday, when he lays all this aside, collects his thoughts, and lives to himself and to the higher nature which is in him, to his true and essential being.⁷

Moreover on the secular side the distinction continues to widen until it becomes open antagonism. Broadly speaking, it may be described as the 'coming of age' of the understanding, bringing with it a sharper awareness of the diversity of human aims generally. External nature at first has to be studied for its own sake, but then progressively subdued to mankind's growing material needs — an undertaking in which modern science and scientific techniques have already gained immense successes, with the promise of continuous future advance. Likewise the increasingly complex organisation and government of society make still further demands on man's intellectual resources. In these vast enterprises he is 'in the presence of *what is his own*'. 'Although he sets out from what *is*, from what he finds, yet he

is no longer merely one who knows, or who has these rights; but what he *makes* out of that which is given in knowledge and in will is *his* affair, his work, and he has the consciousness of having produced it.' This, it may justly be claimed, is his glory and pride — a whole world of culture, of science and of material and moral achievement. Thus the human spirit, initially, it may be, unawares but later consciously, is divided within itself. Two sides of man's being confront one another:

The one is that in which the spirit knows itself to be its own, where it lives for its own aims and interests, and determines itself on its own authority as independent and self-sustaining. The other is that where the spirit recognizes a higher Power — absolute duties, duties without rights belonging to them; and what the spirit receives for the accomplishment of its duties it always regards as grace alone.⁸

It is in fact an entirely different state of mind which religion appeals to and in turn seeks to foster. Here man realises that he is *conditioned*. He demands his right, but whether or not he actually gets it is something independent of his efforts. Thus independence and conditionality are seen to be related to each other, an insight which leads man to confess that everything derives from God — 'all things which constitute the content of his knowledge, which he takes possession of and uses as means for his ends, as well as for himself'. It is religion therefore which imbues him with the feelings of humanity, with a sense of the need for faith and trust in the presence of mystery, and with the consciousness of unmerited grace. Yet religious feeling itself is not exempt from division and duality, in that piety and 'reason' appear to conflict. So it loses its simple and direct character, becoming aware of ends that are purely finite and self-sufficient. 'In this manner science forms a universe of knowledge to which God is not necessary, a universe which is absolutely outside religion and has nothing at all to do with it.'⁹ Knowledge, that is, takes possession of the entire material sphere and makes it its own, while religion becomes 'devoid of knowledge', sinking to the level of mere emotionalism, a 'contentless and empty elevation of the spiritual to the Eternal'.

Clearly the secular attitude fostered by science is alien to the atmosphere in which religion can thrive. Or as Hegel himself

phrases it, religious feeling distrusts the finiteness which lies in knowledge, while knowledge for its part distrusts that sense of the 'totality of things' in which religion is wont to immerse itself.¹⁰ Have we then to conclude that the scientific and religious outlooks are simply irreconcilable? Hegel does not think so; the particular finite ends pursued in all areas of secular endeavour are at their own level, he holds, entirely legitimate. But equally religion is justified in looking to an ultimate End to which all others are subordinated in due order of gradation. But what he does question is that religion and science can somehow together reach a mutual accommodation. In fact religious feeling cannot be simply juxtaposed to the scientific understanding without any attempt to explain why the two are assumed to be complementary; for lacking such an explanation the secular attitude will continue to dismiss religion as the realm of the 'mysterious and arbitrary': in a word, of the irrational. This mediatorial role therefore must be provided by a discipline which is not to be confused with either religion or science. Such a discipline is *philosophy*.

(iii) RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

In Hegel's view both religion and philosophy share, as I have stated, one supreme object: God or the Absolute, i.e. the ultimate Truth, whichever term be used. The religious word 'God' is indeed the older, and mankind certainly had no need to await the birth of metaphysics before conceiving of the idea of the absoluteness and ultimacy of being and truth. But this in itself is evidence that religion is a matter of *thought* (*das Denken*) and not merely feeling. For thought, as Hegel is never tired of insisting, is man's characteristic activity, the one in which he stands altogether apart from the animal creation. Hence he can have no apprehension of reality which would be purely emotional and beyond the grasp of the intellect. To describe religion as something wholly or even essentially of the *feelings* is to misrepresent its true character. For feeling (*das Gefühl*) belongs to man's animal nature and is confined to the individual and subjective.¹¹ Were religion to consist of nothing more than, this, it would have no potential as a means of

communication among men. Not that it should be thought of as at all exclusive of feeling; on the contrary, Hegel has no doubt that emotion plays a large part in it; but the feelings are directed to an object or source that can be rationally conceived.¹²

It is worth while at this point, I think, to emphasise that Hegel's assessment of the religious attitude is not, as is often supposed, that of a pure intellectualist. He does not share the eighteenth-century idea that religion may be reduced to a set of abstract propositions conformable with reason. His view is, rather, what we today would call existential. God, he affirms, must be 'in our hearts'. Yet he immediately adds that the heart is more than feeling.

This last is only momentary, and accidental, transient; but when I say 'I have God in my heart' the feeling is here expressly represented as the continuous, permanent manner of any existence. The heart is what I am; not merely what I am at this moment, but what I am in general; it is my character.¹³

Yet it certainly is the case that Hegel cannot allow that religion is not an issue which through and through involves the work of the intellect. It is at one with philosophy in fastening on what is true in and for itself (*in und für sich*) — 'God as he is in himself and man in relation to him', as Hegel boldly claims. In the end, that is to say, God as the Universal Idea can be realised only in and for thought;¹⁴ indeed only in the developed, speculative thought proper to philosophy in its highest flight, even though the latter be truth in a form accessible to none but those capable of the most determined intellectual effort. For it is philosophical thought alone which can lead us to a comprehension of the totality of being, since by no other means can the true nature of the real (*Natur der Sache*) be laid before us, so that we reach an understanding of it, submit ourselves to it and possess the truth concerning it.¹⁵

Hegel distinguishes two kinds or orders of thought, however. The first is directly related to and dependent on the senses, and may best be described as pictorial thinking. In other words, as the interaction of sense and understanding, it finds expression in images (*Vorstellungen*) which convey truth through represen-

tative symbols. (The word *Vorstellung*, we may note, is one which Hegel uses with both a narrower and a wider meaning: i.e. either as an 'imaginative representation', or else as covering the entire process of our mental activity — sense-experience, memory, imagination, understanding; in short, everything referred to in common parlance as 'thinking'.) The image, that is to say, is not a merely individual 'picture' (*Bild*), but something which through the understanding has received 'the form of the universal'.¹⁶ It presupposes that the absolute or really true Idea cannot be grasped simply as a picture inasmuch as the pictorial mode inevitably involves a restriction of its content.¹⁷

Yet although *Vorstellungen* are genuinely products of thought they are not to be identified with thought at its most exhaustive — thought, that is, which is self-reflective. For although a *Vorstellung* really does yield us the universal it still cannot entirely free itself from the limitations of sense. It is only in *true* thought that this is finally achieved. For of thinking at the highest level, such as 'lifts up the sensuous qualities of the content to the realm of universal thought-determinations', Hegel uses the word *Begriff*, 'concept', meaning literally a 'gripping together' into unity of the different components of a concrete idea.¹⁸ Not surprisingly Hegel judges the record of historical events, vital as it is for a religion like Christianity, to belong only to the sphere of *Vorstellungen*, since the historical is 'a content which at first presents itself in a sensuous manner as a succession of actions or sensuous determinations following each other in time and contiguous moreover in space'. Yet although the historical is thus essentially empirical it has also an inward dimension. 'There is spirit in it which acts upon spirit, the subjective spirit bearing witness to the Spirit which is its content.'¹⁹ But the fact remains that such thinking never achieves more than an analytical abstractness.²⁰

For Hegel, then, the proper function of philosophy is to take us beyond the mental world in which *Vorstellungen* suffice. These, which serve the useful but limited purpose of metaphorical statement, must sooner or later be replaced by concepts, *Begriffe*. Herein however lies what for most people constitutes the peculiar difficulty of philosophy. This can in part be explained by an incapacity, engendered probably by want of habit, for abstract thinking in any form, an inability to grasp pure thought or to move comfortably in it. But there is also,

Hegel believes, another reason, namely 'an impatient wish to have before them as a mental picture that which is in the mind as a thought or concept'. In a word such persons cannot *conceptualise*, as the intellectual rigour of philosophy requires them to do. Religion, on the other hand, envisages the ultimate forms that can be expressed in the language of ordinary men; language in which feeling, imagination and rational understanding are variously compounded. This clearly is so with, for example, Christian doctrine, in which very much of what is said is analogical or figurative. Thus 'Son' and 'begetting' are simply metaphors deriving from a natural relationship and are not intended to be understood in their literal sense. What really is indicated is a relation that is only to be 'likened' to the one described, although as Hegel himself points out, the sensuous relation has *something* in it that corresponds to what in the strict sense applies only to the Godhead.²¹ Again, when the Bible speaks of the 'wrath' of God, or of his 'vengeance' or 'repentance' we at once realise that such terms are not to be taken in their primary meaning but merely as suggestive of a resemblance or 'likeness'. Sometimes no doubt these figures are given detailed elaboration, as with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in *Genesis*, where it is plain to modern minds that the narrative form is not authentic history. Furthermore, religious truth may be conveyed in the shape of stories which are intended to be regarded as historical. Thus the gospel accounts of Jesus are not presented merely as a myth or allegory but as a genuine record of actual occurrences, even though it is the divine signification and not the bare happenings which furnish the inward and 'rational' element in his history.²² Yet even when it comes to metaphysical notions like God's attributes or his absolute creativity or his providential action, the style or character of our thinking is still that of the *Vorstellung*, and so long as ideas of the kind are entertained in isolation this must necessarily be so. Consequently they remain abstract, hence incomplete and not fully comprehensible.

All the same, ideas expressed in the ordinary language of men have an undeniable usefulness, since despite their philosophical inadequacy they are generally intelligible.²³ Thus in the preface to the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* Hegel states that 'religion is the kind and mode of consciousness in which the truth appeals to all men, to men of

every degree of education'. And he goes on to say that 'the scientific ascertainment of truth is a special kind of this consciousness, involving a labour which not all but only a few undertake'. In his own phraseology it constitutes 'the language of the concrete notion'.²⁴ But does this not imply an intrinsic opposition between the utterances of religion and the mode of expression suitable to philosophy? Formally no doubt it does. Religious language, as has been said, addresses itself to the imagination and emotions, and it invokes the force not of argument but of authority: 'Thus saith the Lord.' In this respect it differs totally from both philosophy and science, which alike profess a stern rationality. At this point therefore a certain disparity among all three becomes evident, for whereas religion and philosophy are both concerned with existence in its totality, in contrast with the sciences which investigate the multiplicity of finite being, philosophy and science are akin in spirit and in procedure. Accordingly religion and philosophy do not necessarily find themselves in agreement, despite their common object, and often in the past there has been tension and even conflict between them. Occasionally this has been the fault of religion, suspicious of abstract reasoning, but occasionally also of philosophy, for holding too narrow an idea of what reason itself is. Indeed the distinction which Hegel draws between one order of reason and the other — between *understanding* and *speculation* — is for him all-important and holds a key-place in his system.

(iv) PHILOSOPHY AS 'UNDERSTANDING' AND AS
'SPECULATION'

Philosophy as 'understanding' is in fact only a stage in the full logical development of human thought. Its function is analytic and abstractive. It 'sticks', says Hegel, 'to fixity of characters and their distinctness from one another', treating every such limited abstraction as if it had a subsisting reality of its own. In theory, that is, knowledge begins with the apprehension of existing objects in their specific differentia, since the aim of analysis is to establish clear identities even at the cost of arbitrary separation and isolation. Each and every concept must have its own defining properties regarded as permanent and

constitutive, because unless we can distinguish one thing from another in a manner capable of securing universal consent rational thinking makes no headway — a consideration no less evident in practical affairs as well.²⁵ So in philosophy analysis is clearly indispensable. 'Its foremost requirement is that every thought shall be grasped in its full precision, and nothing allowed to remain vague and indeterminate.'²⁶ This insistence on clarity of distinction and the need for avoiding confusion is of course typical of Hegel's stance as a hard-headed rationalist, but he also has no doubt that were philosophy to restrict itself to its — albeit necessary — analytic task it would fail in its true responsibility. In other words, the philosopher must needs extend his intellectual horizon to include dialectical or speculative thought.

Analytic thinking, then, has to distinguish, elucidate and define; but the sort of definition thus reached affords only an element of truth, in that each single affirmation taken by itself implies its negative or contradiction. By dialectic, on the other hand, is meant that inherent tendency *outwards*, so to speak, by which the onesidedness and limitation of the predicates of the 'understanding' are seen in their true light, and shown to be a negation of them. For anything to be finite is 'simply to suppress itself and put itself aside'. The dialectical principle may thus be said to constitute the life and soul of scientific progress, the dynamic which alone gives immanent connection and necessity to the whole body of knowledge. Hence the third stage in the movement of thought is the *speculative*, or that of positive reason, as Hegel sometimes designates it, which 'apprehends the unity of terms (propositions) *in* their opposition — affirmative which is involved *in* their distinction and transition'.²⁷ For whereas analysis separates, speculation unites, not indeed as a monolithic unity but by creating a totality in which every fact or element has, and is seen to have, its inevitable and therefore proper place.²⁸ Thus we arrive at the final term *Idea*, which means for Hegel the full and adequate knowledge of all that the concept really signifies. It becomes possible only by a complete comprehension of all concepts, a unity of unities — 'truth in itself and for itself: the absolute unity of the concept and objectivity'. But as with Hegel 'reality' is the complete identity of subject and object, the *Idea* is only another way of speaking of the Absolute. And of course the Absolute, in

religious language, is God, the role of philosophy being to explain in terms of an exhaustive logic what it is which this great vocable stands for.

APPENDED NOTE ON THE RELATION OF RELIGION TO ART

In dealing with the philosophy of Spirit, the third and concluding part of his logical system, Hegel's method of deduction becomes noticeably less strict. This is evident in the field of art as well as that of religion. Absolute Spirit, he tells us, may be defined as the apprehension of the Absolute by itself, a process which occurs under a variety of forms, the first being that of art. Here the Absolute is cognised in the shape of *objects of sense*. But within art itself contradiction soon develops; implicitly to begin with, but in time explicitly, as in romantic art, where no sensuous form is felt to be adequate to the spirit which it seeks to express. Yet if the very principle of aesthetic expression lies in apprehension of the Absolute through the medium of objects presented to the senses, the inherent self-contradiction of art must manifest itself, so rendering necessary a new form of the Absolute's self-realisation — one, that is, in which spirit is properly to be cognised as spirit: spiritual things, as we may say, being spiritually judged. Nevertheless spirit is not intrinsically a matter of sense or feeling or emotion; nor, again, of mere abstract thought. Its essence, rather, is Reason, articulated in the Concept or Idea, which alone has the quality of universality. This however is the final stage, that of philosophy, and before it is reached mind has to pass through an intermediate one in which the Absolute is cognised not sensuously as in art, nor yet purely rationally as in metaphysics, where form and content are one, but after a fashion which combines both. This stage is signified by religion. For while religion has the same object or content as philosophy, its manner of apprehending it has affinities with aesthetic experience. In religion therefore the characteristic mode of cognition is bound to be that of the *Vorstellung*, imaginative thinking. But religion can be seen to be superior to art, as approximating more closely to absolute truth.

3 The Main Types of Religion

(i) RELIGIONS OF NATURE

So far in following Hegel we have confined discussion to the nature or 'idea' of religion in general. But religion 'in general' is of course a subjective notion, an abstraction from the concrete facts provided by the many and various religions which either still exist or have existed in the past, each of which possesses (or possessed) distinctive features of its own. The definite (or positive) religions, as Hegel views them, are the species, so to say, of which the former is the genus. The task of the historian of religions is to classify them, to relate them one to another (as far as may be possible), and to record their growth and development. His method will therefore be descriptive, but the descriptions themselves may very well involve assumptions, declared or undeclared, of a theoretic or philosophical kind, and Hegel's own procedure, as I have said, is expressly that of a metaphysician. Thus he sees the history of religion as a process beginning in what he calls the religion of nature, but leading in the end to Christianity as the Absolute Religion in which the reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) of God and man – the leading motif, he maintains, of all religions – is fully achieved. Accordingly he holds that the true origin of religion is not to be sought merely in the empirical antecedents or conditions of its historical appearance and progress, but in the *concept* of religion itself as it exists logically (or in *idea*) in the Absolute Mind itself. In other words, he thinks that philosophy alone can furnish us with an adequate account of religious origins by placing them within that *ideal* framework of thought by reference to which

they can be judged for what they really are — ‘moments’ in an unfolding scheme that is at once logical and historical, temporal and eternal. But with this larger aspect of Hegel’s thinking, fundamental though it is, I am not now concerned. In the present and ensuing chapters I shall confine myself to a survey of his own detailed expositions, asking the reader, however, to bear in mind that Hegel’s purpose is to show how the various positive religions other than Christianity are each in turn inadequate to the idea of religion as such, and even indeed to the successive phases of that idea as disclosed in the necessary course of its historical projection. These phases, broadly distinguished, are three in number: (i) *natural religion*; (ii) the *religion of spiritual individuality* (though this is preceded by an intermediate stage of ‘religions in transition to spiritual individuality’); and (iii) the *Absolute Religion* (i.e. Christianity), which is the true and perfect religion, not in the sense of being exclusive of all others but because it includes them by fulfilling all that they themselves intrinsically aspire to.

Hegel’s systematic classification begins, then, with a dissertation on the idea of religion *per se*, with the aim of discovering how this is both illustrated and embodied in the forms of positive religion. While the principle itself is logical, the method pursued is — ostensibly at least — empirical. Accordingly he at once moves on from the constitutive idea to its simplest and most primitive expression. Natural religion, or rather the religion of nature, he defines as in essence the *unity of the spiritual and the natural*. It is not to be confused however with what in his day was usually designated by the term; the ‘natural religion’ of the Enlightenment thinkers he rejects as a figment of the ‘philosophical’ imagination.¹ But there is also, he observes, a popular notion of it as something which, because of its immediacy, spontaneity and seeming ‘innocence’, is supposed to be ‘the true, the finest, the divine religion’, as well as historically the earliest. It rests, he says, in the idea that spirits were created by God, the absolute God, as images of himself, and as such stood originally in a perfect and unsullied relationship with him. In this primeval state man’s conduct exactly reflected his ‘happy faith’ in all its childlike trust. For man then was wholly at one with nature, feeling no division between his ordinary self, on the one hand, and his own true being (along with the natural world enveloping him) on the other. It is a

belief moreover which sometimes borrows support from Christianity, with its biblical doctrine of an original Paradise — an age or state of natural goodness before the catastrophe of the Fall.

Hegel makes it clear that he does not despise this naïve though widespread conviction. It at least reveals insight into the truth, a glimpse of what ought to be man's 'serene and untroubled consciousness' of the divine reality. Above all it grasps the idea that man is not merely animal being but *spirit*.² All the same, it is mistaken. Man, in order to advance to a larger awareness of himself, must forego this state of innocence and experience guilt. For innocence means that for him nothing is either good or evil; his consciousness is simply undeveloped. As Hegel puts it, the unity of man with nature is a 'favourite and pleasant-sounding expression', which rightly understood means the unity of man with his own nature. But his true nature is freedom, 'free spirituality', so that real unity is no longer merely natural and 'immediate' but reflective.³

What then should be understood by the 'religion of nature' is that generalised sense of the oneness of the natural and the spiritual through which divinity itself is felt to belong to the determinateness of nature; not nature as a whole, indeed, but in some particular existant — the sun, the heavens, an animal, a human being, any of which may become an object of worship. Yet at the same time natural religion has within it a 'spiritual moment or element' involving the idea that 'what is spiritual is for man what is highest'.⁴ And this, Hegel considers, excludes the notion that the religion of nature consists *only* in worshipping natural objects as divine. For as man acquires a sense of his own status and worth in nature 'spiritual' perception is already present. Nevertheless in 'immediate religion' — religion, that is, at its most primitive level — the spiritual is still thought of as a natural potency; the all-important distinction between spirit, as the universal Power, and forms of existence which are no more than particular, contingent and transitory, has not yet been drawn. At this stage therefore man knows no power higher than himself. So to begin with we have to regard man 'as he exists for himself alone upon earth', unable to raise himself to the plane of reflective thought. But it is only with the entrance of thought that more worthy conceptions of God make their appearance.

Contrary to the view adopted by modern anthropologists

Hegel believes that the 'absolutely primary' form of religion is magic. In magic it is felt that the ruling force in nature is spiritual, but it also is a force that can be manipulated by man himself for his own ends, though the actual ability to do so is looked on as the gift of particular individuals who also must be versed in the traditional practices.⁵ It is apprehended moreover as a *direct* power quite unlike that which man can exercise over nature through scientific knowledge. Religion like magic is both ancient — Herodotus mentions it — and widespread, especially among the African peoples and the Mongols and Chinese, for whom shamanism is a common practice. Yet it hardly warrants the name of religion; for religion, rightly speaking, means that spiritual power reveals itself 'objectively' as a mode of the universal. Even among primitive peoples there is at least a glimmer of awareness that this is so, however crude its expression; but in magic it is only the individual consciousness that signifies.⁶ This failure to distinguish properly between the universal and the particular mind implies that power is felt to lie with the mere individual, who is not yet thought of as a rational (i.e. universal) being. Thus the essential poverty of magic is that it expresses nothing beyond individual motivation, and that it seeks to control nature for purely selfish ends. Its practitioner is moved only by the immediate and particular, by passion and impulse, he himself being no more than a part of nature.

The initial step forward, Hegel goes on to say, occurs when man becomes conscious at once of a 'substantial Power' outside himself and of the powerlessness, beside it, of his own will, although exactly what this external potency is he so far of course does not understand. But he senses that all things subsist because of it, even if the freedom of the individual self remains hidden from him. The 'divine' Power, that is, is something to which thought reaches out, but which is not yet apprehended as spiritual in the true sense. Man feels himself to be only a particular empirical consciousness set over against the universal being or 'nature', which appears to him therefore as an objective reality completely encompassing him. This same nature is the substance, the reality, of all things; from it they arise and in it they lose themselves again. Beside it he himself, as a mere sensuous individual, is nothing.⁷

His awareness of this however has some highly significant implications — even though as yet he does not realise it — since

it means that a division has appeared within the human consciousness of a kind which all religion necessarily presupposes. But in its early stage religion sees particular existence as only a temporary and transient modification of this total 'substance' — an 'accident', in fact. Hence it assumes the form of pantheism, not indeed in the popular and incorrect use of the word, according to which the divine is simply identified with particular objects — an idea which Hegel contemptuously dismisses — but as affirming that God is the substance in which all finite reality is immersed. Pantheism in this sense can fittingly be called *the religion of substance* (*Religion des Maasses*); or of 'Being-in-itself' (*Insichsein*), a term which aptly describes the ancient religions of India and China.

It is indeed from their basic pantheism that these religions derive their well-known features. Substance in its activity, says Hegel, is absolute *power*, and thus it is that the oriental religions actually conceive of God. But this power is not related to *ends*. It is devoid of specific content or purpose. 'It is', he comments, 'essentially purposeless and empty power, which merely, so to speak, staggers about.'⁸ The oriental faiths are therefore lacking in any real spirituality, which requires the divine to be thought of as wisdom directing its action towards the good. Again in pantheism the finite individual mind, as a mere 'accident', has no real existence of its own, but is only an appearance or aspect of the whole. Hence freedom does not exist and the reason itself is in bondage. Not surprisingly, for since a nation's political institutions are always to be seen in relation to its religious beliefs political liberty is unknown in societies dominated by this type of religious tradition. But where God is worshipped in a truly rational and moral way good government and just laws may be expected, whilst political freedom can survive only among peoples for whom freedom as such forms part of their deepest consciousness.

The first of these 'religions of substance' which Hegel invites us to consider is, as he claims, the earliest, that of the Chinese. Here religion has evidently emerged from its primary stage of mere magic, inasmuch as the individual mind has now arrived at the point where it can distinguish itself from 'substance' or 'nature' and contemplate the latter as a universal power. Nevertheless the divine 'will' is still conceived of as the entire sphere or order of being without differentiation. Of this the

appropriate image in the physical realm is heaven, the empty sky above, which the Chinese call *T'ien*.⁹ T'ien is 'the highest' that exists, but it is not understood in any properly spiritual sense, and is in effect the wholly indeterminate sum of all material and moral relations. Also the element of magic is still present, in that a human individual, an empirical will and consciousness, continues to be thought of as supreme. This is apparent in the cult of the emperor, for it is he who is really sovereign. In fact it is not heaven which imposes laws and edicts but the earthly ruler who speaks in its name. Thus to all intents he is divine, as his very title, the Son of Heaven, indicates. It is true that the souls of the departed are supposed to have a continued existence in heaven in separation from the body, but being human they belong to this world and so are rightly subject to the imperial rule. It is a mistake therefore to picture the heaven of Chinese belief as an ideal world which, although in important respects parallel to this one is yet infinitely superior to it: heaven, that is, as traditionally represented in Christian teaching, or, in its highly anthropomorphic way, the Olympus of ancient Greece. On the contrary the Chinese heaven is virtually earth itself, with all things in it subject to the rule and governance of an earthly monarch whose sovereignty is complete and unshared. Chinese religion is thus essentially moralism and may be summed up in the word *duty*. On the fulfilment of duty depends the prosperity both of the empire and the individual within it. Apart from ethics and the emperor as the embodiment of law there is no divinity, certainly no personal deity; which is why the Chinese have often been described, not unfairly, as atheists. The teachings of Confucius, who very definitely is a moral not a speculative philosopher, afford the classic exposition of this entire conception.¹⁰

But Hegel's interest in religions of substance finds greater stimulus when he turns to Hinduism, in which the basic idea achieves a more elaborate development. The Vedas clearly fascinated him, although his understanding of Hinduism was of course limited by the amount of knowledge available to him in his day, and what he says, as to both the facts and their evaluation, must frequently be corrected in the light of the much more abundant information open to the modern student. Nevertheless his discussion reveals a notable depth of penetration and well repays the effort of following it attentively. He at

once admits that it is impossible to extract from the Vedas any uniform or precise theological doctrine. Thus the Hindu cosmogonies vary considerably, all of them 'more or less barbarous', and out of them nothing of a fixed character can be derived; nothing certainly as definite and coherent as the Judaic-Christian teaching on the subject. Yet behind them all he is able to discover a single and all-important idea, that of the creativity of thought.¹¹

As *substance* in Hinduism is wholly abstract it is of necessity indeterminate and undifferentiated. Hence logically it must be one, for were there a plurality of substances differentiation would be intrinsic to ultimate reality, which would then have positive content. Moreover it is and must be formless. It is, then, this unique, undifferentiated, formless and abstract substance which the Hindu calls *Brahman*. But out of *Brahman*, despite its inertia, everything has proceeded or is begotten.¹² *Brahman*, that is, signifies the necessary being in relation to which all other existants are contingent: apart from the unchanging One nothing can exist. As thus stated *Brahman* may perhaps appear to have something in common with the deities of other religions – even, it could be urged, with the God of the Old Testament, who also is one and immaterial. But the divine in Hinduism is unitary only in a neuter sense and certainly is not personal. It is without self-consciousness and its very being is potential rather than actual. For as indeterminate substance *Brahman* is not conceived of as spirit; it is simply an impersonal 'Absolute, whether the reality underlying the universe and the human soul or, alternatively, the sum total of all things – the gods, the world, mankind as they are. But because it is purely abstract particular existences can have no part in it. On the contrary, they are entirely 'outside' it, having never in any true sense been created, so that it is quite legitimate to think of them as intrinsically alien to and independent of what alone is real. Further, their multiplicity is sheer, being governed by no principle of unity. So whatever the world may appear to be, it is not a cosmos but a chaos, lacking either prevailing order or informing reason. Hence the exuberant fantasies produced by the Hindu imagination; for although Hindu religion is in theory monistic it is characterised by an untrammelled polytheism almost unintelligible to the Western mind. In popular thinking these multifarious divinities – and they comprise such natural

objects as the sun, the river Ganges and the Himalaya mountains (the special dwelling-place of the god Shiva) — become identified with Brahman itself. And the same is true of moral qualities as well. Of recognisable order in all this there is none, though Hegel allows that much in Hinduism must be taken as symbolical.

Some resemblance has been noted between the personalised manifestations of Brahman and the trinity of Christian dogma, but it is merely superficial and disappears on closer inspection. Thus Brahman is seen as the principle of unity, Vishnu (or Krishna) as signifying life in human form, while the third, Shiva — who on Hegel's own trinitarian logic should represent the return of spirit to itself, thus securing the unity of the other two — is in fact only the potency which determines 'becoming' generally. For Shiva is both the life-giver and the destroyer — 'the wild energy of natural life'.¹³ Instead of being the reconciler he stands rather for the uncurbed, aimless play of begetting and annihilating. In any case the differentiations in question have no permanent effect, for Vishnu and Shiva are only Brahman under temporary hypostatisations; in the oldest of the Vedas Brahman alone is God. Hence there is nothing in the Hindu 'trinity' which corresponds to universal, particular and individual. The undifferentiated One is not, and cannot become, threefold; unitary substance persists eternally and the three seemingly personal deities are only appearances, an element in the ever-shifting world of illusion.

The cultic aspect of Hinduism clearly reflects the character of its beliefs. Where the divine is thought of as abstract and contentless substance, a something which is at the same time nothing, it is not surprising that worship — the means, that is, whereby God and man are reconciled and alienation and separation overcome — should be such as to induce a like self-emptying on the part of the devotee. He too must become contentless and void. Thus Hinduism discourages any development and exaltation of the individual ego, the consciously purposing self, in which it sees indeed only a mirage arising from the mind's connection with the physical body. And since a man's individuality is not his real being, hope of personal immortality is merely a longing to perpetuate the illusory. Religion for the Hindu cannot, in sum, mean a relationship with the divine capable of definition in personal terms. Rather must

he aim at transcending life as he knows it altogether and so reduce to vanishing-point all emotion, effort of will and practical activity, as ultimately any form even of positive consciousness itself. The end of worship is the devotee's losing himself in the Absolute, and with it the dissolution of his individual being. Even the gods cease to exist.¹⁴

Hegel's assessment of Hinduism, even though his own philosophy amounts to a monism, is severely critical. A true conception of God is, he insists, spiritual, and spirit is 'concrete' not abstract, positivity not vacuity. In religions which conceive of God spiritually salvation is concretely realised through a wide range of achievements, intellectual, moral, social, and aesthetic, resulting overall in personal self-enhancement. But for Hinduism release finds expression only in a profligate imagination where 'nothing is reserved for life'. Similarly, although the Hindu utterly repudiates the world, his doing so has little in common with Christian self-sacrifice and carries with it no moral value. Since man himself is without intrinsic worth no human end is aimed at and no moral ideal advanced. Consequently action among Hindus embodies no consistent purpose but is only a motiveless energy perpetually operating. 'Special activity is despised; only stupefaction is held in esteem', a condition no more elevated than that of animal life.¹⁵ The fact is sufficient in itself to explain the state of the Indian masses, sunk in idleness and immorality.

Hegel's judgment is harsh, but his understanding of India's ancient religion was by no means ill-informed, as in his day the literary sources were becoming available and already exerting a discernible influence on European thought. But when he turns to his final instance of the religion of substance, namely Buddhism, his comments at once betray his lack of any proper knowledge of the subject (he is not aware, for example, of the distinction between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism). Its general basis, he recognises, is the same as in Hinduism.

What advance there is merely consists in the necessity felt that the characteristics of the Indian religion should be brought together again out of their wild, lawless independence, out of their merely natural state of dispersion, placed in their inner relation, and their unstable chaos reduced to a state of rest.¹⁶

Buddhism therefore is to be designated a religion of 'Being-within-itself' (*Insichsein*), as inducing 'concentration and tranquillisation' of spirit after the fruitless disorder of Hinduism. But this is accomplished only at a price. Its inner character is one, so to speak, of total stillness; all differentiation has ceased, all determination ended, all particularity annihilated. Individual existence is but 'form' without significance. Thus for Buddhism the ultimate reality is non-being.¹⁷ God — if indeed the word may be allowed — is the absolutely undetermined, the complete negation of particularity. On the other hand, though the divine is thus equivalent to non-existence, it is approached, Hegel points out, in the shape of a particular human being — 'Foe, Buddha, Dalailama'; but this, that a man of flesh and blood should actually be looked on as God, is something 'offensive, revolting and incredible'. The Buddhist's worship, moreover, like that of the Hindu, is a reflection of his belief. Its end is nothingness, a state of annihilation which at the same time is conceived of as the highest possible. For such is Nirvana, the supreme consummation. It is a beatitude in which passion, inclination and action are alike negated.¹⁸ Conformably, the character of the peoples who profess this religion is one of calmness, gentleness and obedience, for with 'enlightenment' all fear, desire, striving and hope disappear. Hence 'great religious associations' spring up among these peoples, whose members live in community 'in repose of spirit and in tranquil contemplation of the eternal, setting aside all worldly interests and occupations'.¹⁹ That Hegel himself looks on such a way of life as apathetic and sterile the reader is left in no doubt.

Between the religions of substance and those of spiritual individuality there is, as already indicated, an intermediate stage in which the idea of God as spirit is no more than adumbrated, although the religions covered by it certainly do contain elements or intimations of the genuinely spiritual. In other words, pantheism gives way to an increasing awareness of the individual as such. Yet it is clear that at this stage the concept of spiritual personality has still not properly freed itself from that of impersonal nature. One may put it as follows, using Hegel's own terminology: The universal — the ultimate reality — may be thought of as either spirit or substance; but in the latter case there is as we have seen, only abstraction and vacuity: concrete being is merely external reality and therefore illusory. Spirit, by

contrast, is fully 'concrete', not only determined but self-determined.²⁰ The particular, that is to say, emerges from the universal by an act of the universal itself, which then overcomes the resulting diremption and separation by drawing the particular back into itself, so reaching a new and fuller self-identity and individuality. True unity, we come to realise, is achieved only in and through division; for although the particular in its separate existence is opposed to the universal, it is only by way of self-objectification of the particular that spirit reaches final self-realisation. In religious terms this comes about in the Absolute Religion as embodied in Christianity alone. But the process of a heightening individualism is clearly traceable in the historical forms which the religious consciousness creates; for even before we arrive at the religions of spiritual individuality rightly so called, we can discern certain elements, inchoate or fragmentary though they may be, which point unmistakably in that direction. Of these transitional forms Hegel examines three: (a) Persian religion (i.e. Zoroastrianism or Parseeism); (b) Syrian religion — with strife, pain and death as its essence; and (c) Egyptian religion — the cult of mystery. We may consider them briefly in order.

(a) With Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion of Iran (although it still has adherents in modern India), we move away from the idea of reality as indeterminate 'substance' and towards determination. The divine now is thought of as the Good. Brahman, as the indeterminate, could be neither good nor evil, such predicates having no application where specificity of any kind is lacking. In Zoroastrianism, however, reality is identifiable, and its content is expressly good. In so far, though, as the idea of substance still underlies it, the Good, Hegel thinks, continues to be thought of as absolute power, Ormazd. Nevertheless the move away from bare substance in the direction of spirit or mind has significantly begun.²¹

Even so the Good is understood only in an abstract way. To be fully comprehended as spiritual the *negation* of good must also be posited, which of course Zoroastrianism does do — but again only abstractly. Good is confronted by its opposite, Ahriman, yet its contest with evil is such that the latter stands over against it as itself an absolute and continuing principle.²² The result is the unresolved dualism typical of this religion. Good and evil oppose each other in a struggle that never ends. It

is not a conflict *within* a unitary reality but an external division which no intrinsic logic can overcome. Moreover Ormazd and Ahriman are personal; or rather personifications, for strictly speaking they are not individual beings at all but personalised symbols of eternally antagonistic forces, and as such they are merely abstractions. That we are still dealing with a 'natural' religion is evident from the fact that Ormazd and Ahriman are simply mythicisations of light and darkness, the powers or qualities by which being is really constituted.²³ For light is good — *the* Good — and darkness evil, Evil itself. It is from recognition of the everlasting differences between these two that dualistic religion takes its rise.

(b) If the Persian dualism is external that of ancient Syrian religion, on the other hand, is internal. For what we have here is not the spectacle of one power in conflict with another outside of and alien to itself, but a division and strife within — 'strife as pain', to use Hegel's own striking expression. The divine, that is, is now in conflict with itself. But in Hegel's view this signifies an advance and marks a fresh stage or 'moment' in the unfolding nature of spirit. 'The loss of one's own self, the contradiction between self-contained Being and its "Other", a contradiction which annuls itself by absorption into infinite unity. . . . These are the essential determinations of the Idea of Spirit which now make their appearance.'²⁴ But at this level any such concept will appear only under the form of myth, in the varying patterns of the death-and-resurrection motif. Thus we have the Phoenician image of the bird which consumes itself by fire, to emerge from the ashes with a new vigour and strength, or the human figure of the youthful Adonis, who dies and rises again on the third day. Indeed the Adonis cult, a spring festival in honour of the dead, is especially interesting. In one aspect it is to be seen as merely a natural process, but in another as symbolical of deity. Its true meaning therefore is not just the alternation of the seasons; it dramatises the general transition from life, affirmative being, to death and negation, with the ensuing 'resurrection' after negation — 'the absolute mediation which essentially belongs to the conception of Spirit'.

(c) Although, finally, in Egyptian religion one has again to deal with a luxuriant and intricate mythology the main features of the Syrian cult are nevertheless perpetuated, and philosophical analysis is able once more to distinguish their underlying

themes. The principal deity here is Osiris, who, like Ormazd facing Ahriman, has an external opponent in Typhon, representing the power of evil. But Osiris also resembles Adonis in having the element of negation in himself; for Osiris too is slain (by Typhon) only to rise again and indeed to become lord of both the living and the dead, punishing evil and securing final victory over his own slayer.²⁵ All of which is to Hegel fraught with deep significance. For the important thing in the Egyptian cult is its stress on resurrection. Death negates the universal, denoted by the life of Osiris, but is itself negated by his rising again. Thus the contradiction of the life that dies is resolved; or in Hegelian language, the universal, negated in the particular, is reaffirmed when this in turn is negated. Nevertheless the whole idea, under a tangled mythological symbolism, remains embedded in the religion of nature, of which the Egyptian *theriomorphism* is characteristic. 'The depths of the universal antithesis are not as yet in it; subjectivity is not yet grasped in its absolute universality and spiritual nature.'²⁶ Hence it still is no more than an external and superficial universality, capable of expression only in the materialistic imagery beyond which the religious sense of this ancient people could not advance. For the spiritual as such it was unable to comprehend.

(ii) THE RELIGION OF SPIRITUAL INDIVIDUALITY

All forms of the religion of substance, even at their best, are no more than meagre anticipations of the more developed expressions of the religious consciousness which alone constitute a proper manifestation of the spirit of man. For in spite of their elaborately anthropomorphic polytheism the real object of all these cults is nature itself. Myth and worship alike are rooted in the sensuous and seldom rise above it. If however the stage of what Hegel calls spiritual individuality (*die Religion der geistigen Individualität*) is to be reached this naturalistic basis must be left behind. And continuing his historico-phenomenological survey he shows at what point this transcendence of the mere power of nature essentially takes place. It is to be found where the gods (or God, in the true, monotheistic meaning of the word) become genuinely personal. Or as Hegel prefers to phrase it, where substance passes over into spirit. Not

that complete spirituality is achieved at a single move. On the contrary, an evolutionary process was necessary, itself marked by certain clearly definable phases, before spirit at last attained its fullest utterance and self-identity in Christianity, which, as we now recognise, is not a merely relative advance in spiritual perfection but is rightly to be understood as the Absolute Religion itself.

When reality is thought of purely as substance or nature it loses all specific content, and the finite world has no part in it except as illusion. But when religion becomes spiritual – when it begins, that is, to apprehend the world itself as the realm of spirit – finitude as such acquires significance. For it is of the nature of spirit as the ‘concrete universal’ that it should manifest itself in the particular under the conditions of time and space. Hence the forms which deity now comes to assume, the gods being individualised as persons active upon and within the corporate life of mankind, founding nations, imparting laws, upholding morality and inspiring art. Indeed this concreteness or determinateness is for Hegel the very hallmark of spirit and the essence of its rationality. ‘Spirit being free, and the finite only an ideal moment in it, it is posited as inherently concrete; what we have is rational spirit: the content constitutes the rationality of spirit.’²⁷ For whereas nature is simply power without purpose and cannot therefore have wisdom as an attribute, the gods – or in the highest instances the one sole God – of the spiritual religions, being conceived of as self-determining personal subjectivity, are also credited with supreme wisdom.²⁸

It is on this account that the religions of spiritual individuality generally are distinguished by their insight into the meaning of freedom. In religions of substance the individual personality is merely accidental; beside nature it has no rights and no meaning of its own. But when the divine is worshipped as Spirit the individual, free and independent, assumes positive significance. For the particular is now no less real than the universal, and even when, ultimately, the particular is transcended by the universal the essence of its being *as* particular still holds its reality. In short, it is both annulled *and* preserved – *aufgehoben*, in Hegel’s famous term.²⁹

The effect of this new understanding on religious belief is to confer upon actual persons, events and situations an intrinsic

meaning and point. The terrestrial life of man gains an importance of its own in relation to the divine order. History, society, morality, law, art and abstract thought are all contributory factors in the positive relationship wherein God and man now stand to one another.

(a) Judaism. First to be considered among the religions of spiritual individuality is Judaism, the religion of sublimity (*Erhabenheit*), as Hegel designates it. Yet he sees it as only a stage removed from the religions of substance. The world of nature, that is to say, has not yet been elevated and transformed by 'free subjectivity'. It is of course *related* to independent mind and purpose, but no positive connection and reciprocity subsists between them: the natural constitutes one order of being, the divine another. The God of Judaism is very emphatically a personal God, but although in that sense spiritual he is not yet understood in terms of 'concrete spirit': i.e. spirit which is so far self-differentiating as to produce the particular from within itself as essentially part of its own being.³⁰ For the God of the Old Testament stands altogether above the natural order; he indeed is the 'sublime'. Beside him all externality, the world of the finite and sensuous, recedes, and becomes as nothing.³¹

But this is not to say that according to Judaism the finite is mere illusion. God is power, but he also is wisdom, and the earth and all that is in it are his handiwork, created out of nothing.³² But this very origination in nothingness marks the finite indelibly and proves its inherent lack of *positive* status. That creation exists at all is only a token of God's graciousness, being the outcome of a totally unconstrained act of goodness. But the goodness from which created things have their existence does not mean that they are not transient and perishable. For God himself, the wholly 'Other', stands absolutely apart from them in the awesome solitude of his own ineffable holiness.

As Hegel interprets the Old Testament creation adds nothing to and takes nothing from God's self-sufficient being. His goodness consists purely in his creativity as such, not in what he actually has made. Finite things rest only on his will and their persistence is exclusively for his glory. Besides, if God's relation to the world is to be defined simply in terms of his specific acts within it the all-important role of miracle in Old Testament belief becomes readily intelligible. For the very principle of miracle is that while God manifests himself in some particular

thing it is always in opposition to the proper nature of that thing.³³ Hence its arbitrary and accidental character. Hence too, we may add, the appropriateness of the description 'sublime' when applied to the Jewish God, for although it is he who establishes the order or state of things in or upon which he acts the latter is nonetheless inadequate as a vehicle for his self-manifestation and has to be negated.

In Judaism well-being depends on right-doing, obedience to the divine law.³⁴ Indeed the knowledge that well-being and right-doing are thus conjoined is the basis of that confident trust which has to be recognised as a fundamental and praiseworthy trait of the Jewish people. Yet there is also a darker side. Man *must* do what is right — the imperative is absolute; but so strong a moral constraint upon the will implies that the believer has perpetually to examine his conscience in order to determine whether or not he really is righteous. The upshot, Hegel thinks, is a persistent anxiety about *sin*, a 'crying of the soul after God', a 'descent into the depths of the spirit', such as are peculiarly characteristic of Jewish religion.³⁵ It also gives rise to a curiously limited conception of God's nature, for although wisdom is among his highest attributes it is a merely general or abstract wisdom with no substantial content. Because in Judaism the idea of God in his relation to both man and nature did not undergo development the sphere of the divine concern remained no wider than that of the family or tribe. A paradox becomes evident therefore. On the one hand God is Lord of heaven and earth, absolute wisdom and universal power, yet at the same time his purpose is so restricted as to fasten on the destiny of a single elect people. Whence follows the particularism and exclusiveness with which the Jewish religion has always been identified. For although the Maker of all things and the Lord of history, the God of the Old Testament remains the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the divine deliverer and ruler of a particular people. For all other peoples are 'shut out' from the blessings reserved for the Lord's chosen, who as a nation are vouchsafed a special constitution with laws, ceremonies and a *cultus* peculiar to themselves.

It is not, then, surprising that Hegel should have found the spirit of Judaism to be one of fear, albeit not in the sense of terror of the finite: 'The fear here spoken of is the fear of the Unseen, of the Absolute, the counterpart of my consciousness, the

consciousness of the self which is infinite as opposed to the finite self.³⁶ All the same the attitude of mind it induces is one of servitude, even though this be the means whereby the servant discovers himself (for the latter feels himself to be 'fulfilled' in obedience to his master, provided their relationship is one always of exclusivity).³⁷

The Jews are deeply proud of being the *elect* people, for although their God is exacting they are peculiarly *his*: the law they recognise is after all given only by him; and this reciprocity is sealed in a covenant depending for their part on the conditions of fear and service. It follows, however, that in Judaism any idea of an intrinsic and permanent relationship between God and man is absent, its place taken by an external bond in the shape of a contract. The whole character of Jewish religion, in Hegel's opinion, devolves from this principle — its deep-rooted sense of obedience, its veneration of law, its conviction of sin, its expiatory sacrificial system. Plainly it is not a sympathetic account (however 'sublime' the Jews' overall concept), although it is less negatively critical than are the early theological essays described in Chapter 1. The faith of the Old Testament, as Hegel sees it, is in some measure an expression of 'free subjectivity', but the true meaning of the phrase Judaism as a whole falls short of realising.

(b) Greece: the Religion of Beauty. Hegel now turns to ancient Greece, with not a little of his old enthusiasm for the ideal of a *Volksreligion* rekindled, for here at last, he thinks, we enter upon the realm of freedom and humanity. Not that the Hellenic religious consciousness had entirely broken with the idea of nature as substance, and its conception of deity continues to some extent in thrall to naturalism ('The human element in God expresses his finitude only'). But whereas in Judaism finitude is negated by God, in Greek religion it is taken up into God; or, better, one sees that the finite world is itself an aspect of God. He is manifested in and through nature, so that the natural now acquires positive value and is not simply, as in Judaism, the opposite of God. In Hellenism accordingly there is no prohibition of the visual representation of divinity such as we find in the Old Testament; and indeed in classical Greece visual art attained the highest degree of perfection. Further, because what is visible and tangible is multiform deity itself appears in a multiplicity of guises. But though the Greek

divinities are many they are not just the crude naturalistic symbols which confront us in Hinduism, for being 'spiritually' conceived they are genuine persons. The fact is that the principle of subjective freedom makes it impossible any longer for the merely natural to furnish the whole content of divinity. Although Zeus is, in a sense, the heavens, as Poseidon is the sea and Apollo the sun, they are all of them more than what they impersonate, as embodiments rather of the spiritual qualities or attributes which the human mind detects in these natural objects or forces.³⁸ This goes far to explain the intrinsic humanity of the Hellenic deities. For Greek religion, says Hegel, is essentially a religion of humanity, of man in the concrete, taking in not only his needs, passions and basic habits but his moral and political relations as well. Thus his gods are not external — as still less alien — to him, but signify instead the perfect realisation of his own life both individually and corporately.³⁹ No doubt the anthropomorphism of the Olympian gods was on a critical estimate their very weakness, but it is not without its attractions, nevertheless. 'In this religion there is nothing incomprehensible, nothing which cannot be understood; there is nothing pertaining to a god which is not known to man, and which he does not find or recognise in himself. A man's confidence in the gods is one with his confidence in himself.'⁴⁰

Because humanity is not thought of as the creature of God, like the clay in the potter's hands, but on the contrary is itself a manifestation of God, man has an inherent right to his own existence. As the gods are necessary to him so is he to them. He is therefore truly free, as his religion makes clear. The worshipper has no need to 'fear' God or feel as nothing in comparison with him, for whereas to the Hebrew God is awesome and even terrible in his righteousness the Greeks saw their deities as near at hand and friendly. 'The powers here are amicable and gracious to man, dwelling in his own breast; he gives them their reality, and knows their reality to be at the same time his own. The breath of freedom pervades this whole world. . . .'⁴¹ This explains his profound respect for duty, justice and the corporate life, the life of the *polis*, resting ultimately, as it does, on family relationships which 'represent what is true, the inner bond that holds the whole together'. No wonder, then, that the Greek people were the most human of all. 'With them every-

thing relating to man is affirmatively justified and developed.' Because religion is thus the fitting expression of the nation's entire existence it has the character of 'absolute joyousness'. The cult does not spell renunciation but the highest elevation of aesthetic pleasure. 'Freedom and spirituality are spread over the entire daily and immediate life of man, and worship, in sum, is a continuous poetry of life.'⁴²

No doubt Hegel has here been carried away by that idealising picture of antiquity which had first gripped him in boyhood. His praise of Hellenism is as one-sided as his depreciation of Judaism. Could life in ancient Greece have been quite so harmonious? Hegel is of course aware that Ananke or Fate (*Schicksal*) controlled all things and that even the gods had to bow to it, but he supposes that the belief served to teach detachment from all human aims and interests and to promote peace and balance of mind.⁴³ Even death itself had for this people no real terrors, since the individual's fulfilment, his 'eternal life', was achieved in the continuing existence of the city-state. In the classical period at least a man did not trouble himself overmuch about either mortality or the after-life, as his true destiny was one with that of the community of which he was in every way content to be a member. It was sufficient that he found his existence here and now positive and self-justifying.

(c) Roman Religion, or the Religion of Utility. The last form of religion which Hegel looks at before turning to Christianity has the distinctive character of 'utility' (*Zweckmässigkeit*), and will be familiar to all students of the life of ancient Rome. It is tempting at a cursory glance to identify Roman religion with the beliefs and practices of the Greeks, but, Hegel observes, the spirit of the one is quite different from that of the other, corresponding to the fundamental differences between the two peoples themselves.⁴⁴ Superficially the gods of Rome resemble those of Hellas, but their function is essentially practical and prosaic. So far as it went the religious sentiment of the Romans was entirely serious, since it envisaged only one end, and in this it had something in common with Judaism, likewise a religion of a single idea. But the Hebrew God is worshipped as an infinite and universal power, whereas in the Roman world the divine exists only for the state itself, *Fortuna publica*. Thus the Roman cult combines the Jewish conception of a universal potency with the Greek adoration of the multiform finite.

Roman religion, that is, parallels Greek in its polytheism, but while the deities of Olympus are ends in themselves, reflecting and symbolising the rich diversity of life as a whole, the Roman pantheon represents only the activities of a people for whom government, the administrative power of the State, is the supreme reality. Hence the religion of Rome has neither metaphysical interest nor imaginative appeal. Such universality as it portends is neither moral nor spiritual, but only empirical, 'the sovereignty of the world'.⁴⁵ When therefore the Greek gods appear in Latinized form they are no more than lifeless imitations of the originals. The final divinisation of the state is reached in the cult of the emperor. Yet as Hegel sees it Roman religion constitutes a requisite step in the transition to absolute religion, if only in revealing the dead-end to which the pursuit of finitude leads. For what we here behold is the 'misery and sorrow' of the 'opposition of Spirit to Spirit', from which, on the terms given, no reconciliation seems possible.

4 The Absolute Religion: Christianity

(i) THE MEANING OF REVELATION

The various types of religion which Hegel has so far considered are each and all of them no more than partial and fragmentary expressions of the universal religious consciousness. What they represent, in objective terms, is the process, both necessary and specific, whereby Spirit is at once self-disclosing and self-realised.¹ Although, that is to say, they contain elements of the truth none in itself, or indeed all of them together, can be judged to have achieved that perfection or completeness of expression, that total conception (*Begriff*) of religion, 'in which', Hegel maintains, 'it is the idea itself that is its own object' (i.e. exists in and for itself, in totality of self-apprehension and understanding).² For if in one aspect religion is man's consciousness of God, in another it is God's own consciousness of himself in man. On this Hegel is quite explicit. God, he states, knows himself in a consciousness which is distinct from himself, because finite consciousness is also *implicitly* his own.³ He distinguishes himself in order to be his own object, while remaining completely identical with himself in so doing. For this precisely is what is meant in speaking of God as Spirit. Hence the perfect religion is that in which the divine self-consciousness is fully attained. This religion, and this only, merits the designation *absolute*, because here Absolute Being finds its complete reflection. When we look for it in history Christianity alone is seen to embody the ideal.

That is why the Christian religion is rightly spoken of as *revealed*. No longer is God an unknown Being afar off; he has

made himself known to man not merely in nature or the events of external history but through man's own inner consciousness. Thus even to the finite mind he is absolutely manifest. In other religions the knowledge of God, however authentic in its degree, is still burdened and obscured by limitations of view — limitations on account of which man himself unavoidably suffers. But, says Hegel, it is the work of Spirit in the course of its historic self-unfolding to overcome these limitations even at the cost, in the earlier stages, of 'the world's sorrow'.

But before embarking on any direct discussion of Christian doctrine Hegel sets out the logic (or metaphysic) of the Absolute Religion, indicating what he means by revelation and showing how it provides the ultimate guarantee of truth and freedom. The absolute religion is revealed religion (*offenbare Religion*) in that it comes to mankind as a disclosure from without, although necessarily under the conditions of historical contingency. This does not imply a heteronomy, for the truths thus made known will be seen by man himself to be rationally valid, so that recognition of revelation is one with his deepening apprehension of his own self-identity. Thus his autonomy is preserved and the truth makes him free.⁴

Completeness of freedom, wholeness of truth — such, no less, is what Christianity, as distinct from all other religions, has to offer. It is the perfect religion, 'the religion which represents the being of Spirit in a realized form, or for itself (*für sich*), the religion which religion has itself become, objective in relation to itself'. Herein the universal Spirit and the particular spirit, infinite and finite, are inseparably conjoined. In fact it is their mutual identification which is uniquely constitutive of this religion, furnishing its very substance and content.⁵ In other words, Christianity is the outcome and expression of the eternal dialectic immanent in God's own being as it works itself out under the conditions of time and space. Properly understood, God is not the external, 'objective' God of traditional theology, an 'Other' more or less remote from the individual, subjective mind, like the sun in the heavens above. Rather is he, by virtue of his indwelling in the subjective consciousness, the essence of religion itself.⁶ Such an understanding, Hegel insists — with a disapproving side-glance at eighteenth-century rationalism — is entirely consonant with the standpoint of modern man, who now is more concerned with religion itself and what it means to

be religious than in demonstrating the object to which religion is supposed to refer. 'Men have various religions, and the main thing is for them to be pious.' For we cannot know God simply as an object; what signifies is the subjective *manner* of our knowing him and our personal state of mind as religious believers — an affirmation which brings Hegel close enough to Schleiermacher and marks him out as one of the inaugurators of the intellectual attitude characteristic of both the last century and our own.⁷

Religion, then, is the knowledge which Spirit has of itself as spirit. Indeed it is exactly thus that revelation is to be defined. God reveals himself *to himself*; but were he not to reveal himself he would not be God, inasmuch as self-manifestation, self-projection is of the very essence of spirit. 'Revealed religion is manifested (*geoffenbart*) religion because in it God has become wholly manifest. Here all is proportionate to the Concept [*Begriff*, i.e. what God is in himself]; there is no longer anything secret in God.' And revelation, Hegel insists, is a work of the divine spirit, not a discovery of man.⁹

Thus revealed religion, in manifesting Spirit to spirit, is the true religion of spirit, regarding nothing as alien to itself except what it recognises to be no more than a temporary estrangement. For it is God himself who creates the 'Other', as he in turn abrogates it by fulfilling it — 'taking it up again in his eternal movement'. That is why it is of the nature of Spirit to be its own phenomenon, to appear *to itself*, through a process of self-objectification. 'This constitutes its act, or form of action, and its life; this indeed is its only act, and is itself only its act.'¹⁰ God, we must come to see, exists *in* his self-revelation, by means of differentiation and determination. Hence the *positivity* of religion.

Let us try, however, to be more precise. Spiritual religion, we may say, is positive in that everything which exists for a consciousness presents itself as externally objective to it. Whatever it is we *know* comes to us, that is, from outside ourselves. Thus what we learn from the senses obviously is positive. But the spiritual also comes to us in this way — at first as finite and historical, and then, through reflection, in its deeper spiritual significance. Spiritual reality exists for us and possesses authority over us not only because we can recognise its presence and force, but as something intrinsic to our personal being, so that

we ignore it at our peril. In other words, we should be less than human were we to persuade ourselves that the spiritual does not exist.¹¹

Positivity therefore is not to be thought of as unnatural or foreign. The laws which determine our freedom, for example, are necessarily framed with a view to conditions actually obtaining, and so at first may seem arbitrary. And it is the same with religion; being *phenomenal* it has to be historical and contingent, and therefore may not appear altogether rational — and indeed in the contingent and positive there is likely always to be some element of non-rationality. But when the *merely* adventitious is discounted, the true meaning of positivity may be properly assessed. Statute law, for example, is not bare facticity, but — as we learn more and more — is an institutionalised expression of our rational nature. Religion likewise is not to be seen as a mere congeries of popular traditions and beliefs. No doubt the verification of faith has often been based on external ‘evidences’ such as miracles, regarded as, so to speak, the ‘credentials’ of revelation. But miracles belong to the world of sense-experience and are supposed to involve material changes capable of being actually witnessed. Yet even if miracles are accepted as providing *some* degree of evidential force, as a demonstration of truth they are inadequate, since what is spiritual cannot be proved by physical testimony alone. Spiritual things must be spiritually judged, and in the long run the miraculous is irrelevant as a criterion of truth. Indeed Christ himself rejected it on this ground (cf. Matt. 6:22).

The witness of the spirit can of course take a variety of forms. Sometimes it may be only vague and indefinite. An historical narrative, for example, may be so inspiring as to awake in us an immediate response of sympathy and admiration which we cannot always readily explain or express. At others it may assume an intellectual form and address itself directly to our reason. But whether it comes to us in a sophisticated guise or not it is always the highest levels of our nature — the whole realm of our reflective thinking — which are implicated. It is here that philosophy has its beginning; emotional sympathy and moral approval are transcended in the knowledge of truth. For not only does the Idea or Concept present us with the truth. For not only does the Idea or Concept present us with the truth, we ourselves recognise *how* it does so and *why* — though

Hegel is again careful to point out that there is no necessary antagonism between simple religious belief and philosophical thought, since a just conviction of God's existence or of the doctrines of religion does not depend on proof of their rational validity. On the contrary, we have no right at all to demand that truth always be arrived at philosophically. 'The spiritual needs of men vary according to their culture and development; and so too does the requirement and assurance that we must believe on authority vary according to the different stages of development reached.'¹² When this fact is borne in mind we can the better appreciate the role of miracles in popular belief, for at least they stir the imagination and touch the heart. However it must not be forgotten that the religious emotions are those of men who also *think*. Christian doctrines as taught in the Bible are given in a positive and external way, but if they are really to 'come alive' for us they must be subjectively appropriated – taken into our inner nature and embraced there. Thus only will a genuine conviction take root. Yet because man is a thinking being he cannot be satisfied with a purely spontaneous acceptance of religious truth; somehow he has to grasp it with his rational intelligence. And it is from this basic intellectual need that theology or 'scientific' religion arises, a development which for Hegel represents the testimony of the spirit at its highest.

But, it may be asked, is it not enough for the believer simply to stand by his Bible and the plain truths enunciated there? The answer is that obviously there are very many people for whom the words of scripture do suffice, and their religious life draws ample nourishment from them. Knowing and quoting the Bible, however, is not enough to make a theologian; sooner or later the time comes for explanation, for a deeper intellectual penetration of the text – whence the task of reasoned judgement and inference, processes to be validated only by the principles of logic. To claim that one's ideas and beliefs are founded on the Bible, and that in any case theology should keep to a purely biblical content, sounds plausible enough. But, says Hegel, once the biblical theologian passes beyond the familiar scriptural phraseology his thinking is bound to be influenced by presuppositions of his own, and these inevitably relate to the thought-categories of the age to which he himself belongs. Thus the subsequent exegesis may differ widely from the original meaning.¹³ Moreover any method of explanation is likely to introduce a further element of positivity, the truth of

which should not be taken for granted. And only when we do not take our assumptions for granted, but realize the importance at some point of looking into them, shall we be ready for the philosophical quest. So if theology repudiates philosophy it does so either because it is unaware of the extent of its actual reliance on philosophical categories or because it makes surreptitious use of ideas that it knows to be idiosyncratic and arbitrary — a type of ‘positivity’ much better eliminated altogether. It is, Hegel argues, in the speculative Idea alone — in philosophical thinking at its most constructive — that true standards of interpretation are to be found.

Biblical doctrine thus unavoidably suffers from the limitations of its own positivity. The letter killeth; it is the spirit which gives life. But what kind of ‘spirit’ is requisite if the letter is really to speak truth to us? Here Hegel faces what we today would call the hermeneutical problem. An attitude of mere passive receptivity will be fruitless; for thought to be productive it must be deliberate, fully cognisant of what it is about.¹⁴ Above all it must never misconceive the material it is working on and substitute, even though unconsciously, the human for the divine, the accidental and arbitrary for the absolute. This, Hegel contends, has led to the virtual discarding by much contemporary theology of Christianity’s basic doctrines.¹⁵ So far from the Church’s dogmas being unnecessary for faith, or hindrances to its growth, they are in fact the historically appropriate forms through which the eternal truths of religion find expression.¹⁶ ‘At the present time’, he goes so far as to claim, ‘it is philosophy which is not only orthodox, but orthodox *par excellence*’, maintaining and preserving the principles which have hitherto always held good.¹⁷

It accords then, with his whole method that Hegel should begin his study of the Christian religion not from the historical standpoint, with the aim of gradually working inwards to its central determining ideas, but from the pure concept itself, as he seeks to establish it metaphysically.

We are conscious [he writes] that we are thinking on thought itself, on the course taken by the categories of thought, a kind of thinking which has tested itself and knows itself, which knows how it thinks, and knows which are the finite and which the true categories of thought.¹⁸

In a word, it is the intrinsic *logic* of the Christian religion which must first be comprehended — its constitutive principles, its inner coherence and overall necessity in the entire process of the evolution of *Geist*. This does not mean that its historical identity as manifested in its various beliefs and institutions can in the long run be ignored. Far from it; the history is the actualisation of the idea and hence is necessary to it, inasmuch as the latter, as Hegel never tires of insisting, is a concrete reality, not an empty abstraction. That is why the history can be understood only when its intrinsic logic has been revealed. Further, it is because the inner nature of Christianity can be explained in this consistently rational and seemingly *a priori* way that we can rightly describe it as the religion of truth and freedom. For only when, as here, subject and object, finite and infinite, human and divine are united in the Concept or Idea is the fulness of truth arrived at; only when, as here, the mind is no longer constrained or inhibited by anything essentially foreign to it and advances, as it were, in its proper element is freedom really attained. And with truth and freedom come reconciliation — *Versöhnung* — a word which sums up the whole Christian insight. Reconciliation starts from the fact of differing forms of existence that stand to each other in a relation of opposition — God, who is opposed by an alienated world, and a world which equally is alienated from and contradictory of its own essential nature. '*Versöhnung* is the negation of this separation, this division; it means that each recognizes itself and finds itself and its essential nature in the other.'¹⁹ Thus reconciliation is liberation, understood however not as a fixed state or realised condition of things but as activity working through a universal process. This certainly cannot be expressed, except one-sidedly, in a single proposition. The idea, says Hegel, which best conveys the truth in a popular form is that of the union of divine and human in an actual life — that God has, as the Christian creed puts it, become man. Such unity, to begin with, is potential only, and has to be progressively realised. Yet the process itself is reconciling, though only of course because of the potentiality which renders it possible in the first place. The truth which religion thus enshrines philosophy proceeds to demonstrate, elucidating in conceptual form what the Idea — the philosophical concept of God as he is in himself — must contain. In its 'ideal' form it is a question of

logic alone, but it is realised in the concreteness of history. Nature, life, spirit, we perceive, are through and through organic, and each separate entity is the reflection of the universal Idea, which, although it always discloses itself by means of the particular, thus manifests a unity wherein every difference is transcended.

(ii) CHRISTIAN DOGMA

Hegel's philosophical account of the Christian religion as set out in the third part of his *Philosophy of Religion* needs to be supplemented and illustrated by the historical survey contained in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.²⁰ The former work, that is, continues to treat the subject on mainly abstract lines. For what interests Hegel is the inner logic of Christian doctrine, quite apart from the historical conditions under which it took shape. Indeed he believes the essence of Christianity to reside in its dogma, which is why, as I have already remarked, he has so little sympathy with those who would empty religion of its dogmatic content. Thus the successive aspects under which Christianity as the absolute religion — 'the religion which represents the spirit of God in a realised form' — appear, are as follows. First, God must be understood as he is in himself, as the absolute and eternal Idea, unrelated to creation or the world of humanity. Secondly, the created order is to be viewed in relation to him under the forms of both physical nature and finite spirit; for the cosmos not only objectifies or 'dirempts' God, but in a vital sense alienates him from himself; though it is an alienation which in turn demands a reconciliation. Thirdly, the actual process of reconciliation may be construed in Christian terms as the unifying and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. These three facets of truth are not arbitrary categorisations imposed by the abstract intelligence but constitute inherently necessary stages or 'moments' in the evolving life of Spirit itself. Analytic thought (*Verstand*) reflects or records them, but does not determine them. The first stage is to be conceived of as 'outside' time, the second within time, the third as both within time and reaching out 'beyond' time in an eternal present. Similarly the *locus*, so to speak, of the unfolding divine life is, first, 'heaven', then the world, and finally the world 'lifted up' again to eternity.

Philosophically these stages or moments are those of the universal, the particular and the individual respectively – the universal which undergoes diremption into the particular, and the particular once more restored to the universal in the individual.²¹ But the language of philosophy is not for all men. Christian trinitarianism supplies the appropriate *Vorstellung* of the absolute and eternal Idea. As a dogma, says Hegel, this concept has been reduced to the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit – ‘a childlike relation, a childlike natural form’; and he adds that ‘the Understanding has no category, no relation which in point of suitability for expressing the truth can be compared with this.’²²

God himself, as the concrete universal, is absolute Spirit, at once identical with all real being and the ground and goal of all true thought. It is as such that the religious term ‘Father’ is referred to him as he is in himself before and apart from creation. ‘Fatherhood’, that is, is a *Vorstellung* of his eternal essence, as yet unmanifest, even though the conception itself becomes possible only in consequence of such manifestation.²³ As a logical idea God exists in total harmony with himself, the differentiation within his eternal reality having as yet the form only of pure ideality. This realm of bare concept Hegel designates the Kingdom of the Father; but as the universal gives being to the particular, so in theological parlance the Father begets the Son. This is the moment of separation or particularisation in general, the stage of differentiation or determination. However, the begetting of the Son is an eternal process whereby the Father is always ‘reflected’ in the Son and the Son in the Father. When the Son comes into the world we have ‘the beginning of faith’, since even to speak of the Son as ‘coming into the world’ is to use the language of faith. All that pertains to the world in which the Son appears and which has its principle of being in him may thus be called the Kingdom of the Son. Lastly, the *relationship* of Father and Son, one of ideality in difference, is what Christian theology means by the Holy Spirit, for which the word Love is a fitting synonym, as implying both the distinction and the union of the other two, their unity in difference.²⁴ On earth the sphere of the Holy Spirit is the Church, the Spiritual Community, which can rightly therefore be known as the Kingdom of the Spirit (*das Reich des Geistes*).

Looked at in the light of the understanding, *Verstand*, which regards opposites as mutually exclusive and separate, the Trinity is a mystery, if not a puzzle. How indeed, if the units be thought of as *persons*, can three be one or one three? Yet the basic doctrine of the Christian religion maintains precisely this. To interpret it meaningfully, Hegel tells us, we have to approach it *speculatively*, by way of *Vernunft*, since what it signifies takes us to the very heart of spiritual existence. When we say that God is Spirit it is the dogma of the Trinity, as the interior differentiation of his eternal being, that enables us to use the word intelligibly. For only so is God's nature is revealed to us.²⁵

Christian theology teaches nonetheless that the 'tripersonality' of God should not be thought of as implying three separate personal identities, which would of course amount to tritheism. The philosophical concept of the *Idea* makes it plain that, on the contrary, the differentiations represent simultaneous moments in its continuing being. To the mind of the rationalist the trinitarian doctrine is incomprehensible, a mere self-contradiction. Yet religious believers themselves are wont to speak of it as a mystery, in its seeming defiance of rationality. Hegel argues however that the divine being is not a mystery in the usual sense of the word. It is a mystery, that is, only 'for sense-perception, for ordinary abstract thought, for the senses and their way of looking at things'.²⁶ In fact the doctrine is entirely comprehensible if, as Hegel demands, 'reason' is taken in its speculative meaning, for which the identity of opposites is a central principle. To the genuinely philosophical intelligence therefore it will be seen to be inherently rational. It is the wholly indeterminate, the empty monad, which is really incomprehensible.

When the Idea is thus known to represent what is the one and essential nature of God, the next step is to cease to regard it as something belonging to a region above human thought and beyond this world, and to feel that the goal of knowledge is the recognition of the truth in the particular as well; and if it is thus recognised as present in it, then all that is true in the particular involves this determination (*Bestimmung*). To know in the philosophical sense, means to know anything in its determinateness.²⁷

Creation stands in the closest relation to the Trinity, in that the one doctrine involves the other. Metaphysically it denotes the transition of the Idea from its state of universality and infinity to the determination, or specific form, or finitude. The universe, we may say, is implicit in the Absolute, so that its manifestation is simply the necessary succeeding stage in the self-realisation of *Geist*. But difference does not destroy identity. 'What is differentiated is determined in such a way that the difference at once disappears, and is seen to be merely a relation of God to himself, of the Idea to itself.'²⁸ This act of differentiation Hegel describes as 'a playing of love with itself', in which it does not pass over into 'otherness' in the sense of division, separation and alienation. The true Other – a real distinction within subsisting identity – is in theological language the Son, the second 'Person' of the Trinity, who is with the Father – *homoousios*, as the Nicene creed terms it. Hence the whole realm of differentiation may be broadly designated the Kingdom of the Son, on the theological principle that he is not only God's agent in creation but contains within himself the archetypes of all created things. The Son therefore is to be thought of as free personality existing for himself and in clear distinction from the Father's own being. The idea of his eternal generation signifies the eternity of that self-differentiation which inheres in the very nature of God as Christian doctrine conceives him.

But if the Son is the eternally creative principle then creation itself must be understood as a necessary stage or episode in, or aspect of, the evolving life of Spirit. However, the *truth* of the world, says Hegel, is in idea only and does not as such require actuality. 'It is involved in its nature that it should *be*, but only in an *ideal sense*.'²⁹ Thus we may quite rightly think of it when actualised as separate, and even alienated or estranged. Yet the estrangement is not final. 'The Being of the world means that it has a moment of separate being, but that it annuls this separation and alienation [*Entzweiung*] from God, and that it is its true nature to return to its source, to enter into a relationship of Spirit or Love.'³⁰ This return from a state of revolt and separation is, then, what is meant by *Versöhnung*, reconciliation. Yet the force, so to speak, of the estrangement must not be minimised. The world, and the life of man especially, is to be seen not simply in its ideal completeness, represented by the

eternal Son, but in its realised condition, in the extremity or polarisation of its 'otherness'. Then indeed it raises a profound moral problem, for the world seems now to be altogether independent of God, to possess a freedom of its own making. The truth, though, is that God deliberately *allows* this freedom and autonomy, and in so doing, Hegel maintains, indicates the measure of his own freedom and security; although, when looking at the state of man in all his sinfulness and misery, one is impelled to ask why God should have permitted so great a degree of freedom to his creatures as to have enabled such a result to follow. And to this, perhaps, Hegel fails to give an altogether satisfactory answer. If the 'otherness' of the Son – or as early Christian theology would have expressed it, the divine Logos – involves no alienation from the Father but implies the continuing fullness of the divine perfection, how is it that with creation comes weakness, imperfection and evil? What Hegel seems here to have in mind is, I think, a kind of pre-mundane Fall (*Abfall*), for he cites the opinion of the early seventeenth-century mystic Jacob Böhme that Lucifer, the light-bearer and prince of angels, in seeking an independent existence for himself, brought about a revolt from God.³¹ The evil, Hegel seems to be saying, really lies in finitude itself, in the drive of finite things to be simply what they are as finite. Reconciliation is a correction of this, a reorientation of the finite away from its own finitude to the infinite, its source and true home.

At first sight the theory looks all a little too smooth. But let us try to be fair to Hegel and consider what really it is he means by alienation. The world, he recognises, is the scene of conflict between good and evil, of an ever-continuing struggle. Man himself is by nature both good and evil. To assert that he is good is in effect to claim that he is potentially spirit, rationality, having been fashioned – in biblical language – in the image of God who is the source of all good. But human goodness is relative or partial only. Nature is man's background; he himself indeed is part of nature, as his physical make-up and animal instincts show. On the other hand it belongs to the 'idea' of man's existence that he should be intelligent and free, so fulfilling a destiny with which his merely natural condition is not in the long run compatible. And it is precisely this incompatibility between what he is and what he ought to be that constitutes the evil in his condition. Further, it is when he

perceives this — when, that is, he gains a true insight into his own state of being, so inadequate to his ultimate vocation, that he inevitably feels guilt.³² For if man, unlike the animals, is to achieve goodness 'it must be by the action and consent of his own will'. He must not, in other words, allow himself to remain in his merely instinctual condition; his desires and inclinations have to be curbed and disciplined. Only so can that true state of the will develop which represents the higher rational self. But the process of self-mastery is painful, especially as man comes to realize the depth of his sin and moral wretchedness, a depth from which he cannot drag himself up by his own efforts alone. Hegel, it should be emphasized, does not wish to gloss over the evil in mankind. To him it is much more than the simple transgression of a law. Evil is *within* man himself. 'He is implicitly evil (*böse*), evil in his universal character, in his innermost nature, evil in his interior being.'³³ These are strong words yet does this dire condition really follow from the view that man's natural impulses fall short of his moral ideal? Is not Hegel, in fact, merely repeating the traditional language of Protestant orthodoxy, which, however, defined sin in terms not of man's continuing immaturity but of the radical perversion of his will?

Be that as it may, Hegel's contention is that when man comes to realise the extent of his spiritual need and his own incapacity in face of it religion has its beginning. For what religion offers is the overcoming of estrangement and loss. Unhappily the forms of religion which earlier made their appearance in history were not capable of dealing with the human condition at its root. Men had to undergo acute suffering before the time was ripe for the divine word of reconciliation to be uttered with power. Stoicism and similar types of world-renouncing philosophy had tried to bring mankind release, but flight from actuality proved no satisfactory answer, only a confession of failure. For the world as it is had to be looked at realistically and responsible living within it assumed. Reconciliation in *principle* however was attained for all men by the incarnation, the coming of Christ with his gospel of a loving God. This event, declares Hegel, was 'the axis on which world history turns'. For the incarnation, which proclaims the union of God and man, was and remains, unlike the avatars of the eastern religions, a wholly unique event. For Christ was not simply a man, however

inspired, but the Son of God.³⁴ 'If we say nothing more of Christ than that he was a teacher of humanity, a martyr for the truth, we do not occupy the Christian standpoint.'³⁵ Therefore is he rightly spoken of as the God-Man. Of his manhood certainly there is no question; 'God appears as an individual person to whose immediacy all kinds of physical necessities are attached.' But the union of humanity with divinity is something which to the ordinary rational understanding is incomprehensible; as indeed it must be if we posit a total disparity between God and man. Yet the fact is that Christ calls himself both Son of Man and Son of God — titles to be taken, Hegel insists, in their strict meaning. And because Christ is historically the focus of the meeting of divinity and humanity he manifests that reconciliation for which mankind longs. Salvation has been achieved and its significance for human destiny proclaimed. It is now for man to accept the truth and make it his own.

Versöhnung, in other words, has to be actuated in history and individual experience. On the side of God 'it is finished', but with the death of Christ there begins, as Hegel puts it, 'the conversion of consciousness'. For that death is 'the central point round which all else turns', and in the value we attach to it lies the difference between any merely outward way of looking at it and the inward perception of faith, i.e. 'regarding it with the spirit, taking our start from the spirit of truth, from the Holy Spirit'.³⁶ The conversion of consciousness comes with the appropriation of the meaning of the incarnation and especially the atonement, by an individual and personal act.³⁷

(iii) THE CHURCH

We should observe that in all this Hegel adheres quite rigidly to the language of orthodox Christian teaching. He does so because he believes it voices the experience of the Christian Church, an experience which has its definitive expression in dogma. With the actual mission of Jesus as told in the gospels he is relatively little concerned. What matters is the total significance of Christ as this is confessed and embodied in the Spiritual Community (*Gemeinde*). It is a sheer mistake to think of Christ only as an historical figure, even though as such he furnishes us with a superlative moral example. For the incarnation doctrine as it

came to be defined stands for that truth or *idea* of which the Person of Christ is the unique symbol. The Church preaches that he is the one in whom the unity of God and man was realised at a specific time and place, who, in his death and historic mission generally, himself represents the eternal process of Spirit, a process which every man has reproduced in himself in order to exist as spirit — to become a child of God and a citizen of his kingdom. The followers of Christ who unite upon this principle, seeking to make the spiritual life their governing aim, are those precisely who constitute the Church, which is nothing other than God's kingdom.³⁸ In fact it was only in the experience of the primitive Christian community that the true meaning of Christ was discovered. For the faith is not simply the recollection of Jesus' own words, as still less a mechanical piecing together of biblical texts, but an inner conviction generated by the spiritual society within itself.³⁹ The real being of the Church is in its 'continual becoming' — its continuously developing historic life — and in its power to be freely productive of those 'finite flashes of light' which are recreative of the individual consciousness bringing, it to an ever-deepening comprehension of itself. In this way the Christian consciousness becomes divine consciousness, under forms progressively adequate. 'Out of the ferment of finitude . . . Spirit rises like a vapour.'⁴⁰

The Church, then is the society in which the world's evil is already in principle overcome. Imbued with the spirit of Christ it is itself Christ's *actual* kingdom, something which has an existence here and now and not merely in the future. The spiritual environment which the Church provides for the individual eases his way on earth and encourages him gradually to attain to the full stature of his moral manhood. The nature of this spiritual fellowship is expressed in the sacraments. Baptism shows the child as having been born into a sphere essentially different from the sin and misery of a hostile world; whilst in the eucharistic rite man enjoys 'in a sensible immediate way the consciousness of his reconciliation with God' and the indwelling Spirit within him. ('What we have here is the consciously felt presence of God, unity with God, the *unio mystica*, the feeling of God in the heart.')

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The authority of the Church lies in the fact that it establishes its members in a corporate life based on the common possession

of a recognised truth. The life of the individual is drawn into and made to share a tradition, both doctrinal and ethical, which completely transcends his own subjectivity and within which idiosyncrasy and personal wilfulness are curbed. Each of us, as is right, can give expression to his own reason and conscience, but under the guidance of a communal wisdom much wider and deeper than anything he could have acquired from individual experience. In urging this Hegel is of course only stating a view in every way consistent with his ideas on civil society and the state. In both realms, the ecclesiastical and the political, it is the customs and laws of the community as a whole which are normative for the individual, whose true ethical ideal is to be realised within the context of the entire corporate life. This indeed is primarily what Hegel understands by 'ethics' (*Sittlichkeit*), as distinct from the personal 'morality' (*Moralität*) that relates mainly if not exclusively to private life. Nevertheless the community is not static: always there must be change in continuity as well as continuity in change. Within Christianity the Protestant principle, *ecclesia semper reformanda est*, is that of purification and progress, in contrast with the Catholic *semper eadem*, which is that of preservation, the retaining from the past all that human experience has found permanently valuable. The two principles are co-ordinate; remove either and the outcome is sectarianism, whatever name it may profess.

One can now see why Hegel attaches so much importance to the Church's doctrinal tradition, to its *dogma*. For without dogma, as the intellectual articulation of its constitutive faith and experience, it could not subsist, even were it able to achieve self-identity. Hence the doctrinal tradition must in all essentials be maintained, confessed and taught as objectively valid truth. In order to lift the community's belief altogether above the region of personal caprice and fluctuating opinion it was necessary to enshrine it in verbally fixed formularies. Dogma therefore might be described as the intellectual precipitate of a common faith arising from the shared experience in which the spiritual community had its beginning and by virtue of which it continues to live. Hence the importance of the Church's educative role. For the potentiality of the human spirit 'is in this way brought into consciousness as something objective, . . . is developed in such a manner as to know that to be the truth wherein it exists'.⁴²

Between the teaching of the Church and the outlook of the 'world' there is, at a certain level, an inevitable antagonism; yet at another the world's wisdom is supplementary to it, in that in the past it has provided the intellectual forms under which the doctrinal articulation has itself occurred. So much is clear when one considers, for example, the influence of Hellenistic philosophy upon early Christianity. That philosophy had itself developed a largely religious motivation; how are the world and mankind related to God? The Logos-concept was its answer, and the affinity between this and Christianity was soon to become apparent.⁴³ That the former was in its origin pagan is of no consequence. 'It is a matter of perfect indifference where a thing originated; the only question is: "Is it true in and for itself?"' It was enough, not that a doctrine should have the explicit sanction of the Bible, but that men should sincerely believe the Spirit would guide them into all truth; although it has to be recognised that philosophy was the parent of heresy as well as of orthodox dogma. But on the whole the impact of the Greek philosophical mind proved beneficial. The Christian religion was intellectualised while still preserving its intelligibility for the simple. It has thus shown itself adaptable to every degree of culture without falling short of the most exacting demands of reason.

But the historical evolution of Christianity was not only on the side of doctrine and theology; it became an institution of world significance, and as such had to enter into relation with civil society. The Church in its outward aspect, that is, is not merely one religion among others but, in addition, a particular form of secular existence occupying a place side by side with other such forms. The religious reality is determined by the *lex Christi*, but the Church's secular constitution is a matter for its members' own choice. So the historic organisation came gradually into being in response to particular needs and opportunities. To the governing body of the Church, the *magisterium*, the Spirit is vouchsafed in a fully revealed and explicit way, whereas among the mass of the community it is only implicit.⁴⁴ Thus spiritual and temporal authority were combined, resulting in an *ecclesiastical* kingdom within the Kingdom of God.⁴⁵ No doubt such a development was unavoidable and even salutary; but it meant for the great body of the Church's membership that authority would appear as imposed, heteronomous, even arbi-

trary. True freedom of the spirit was not yet and would be achieved only after centuries, and in the face of tyranny.⁴⁶ Moreover the priesthood was to take shape as virtually a caste or aristocracy attaining its apogee in the middle ages, when, as Hegel says, 'the laity were alien to the Divine'. The world of the *sacred*, that is, was regarded as something external to the ordinary life of men, direct access to it being reserved to the clergy. 'The laity had simply to believe: obedience was their duty – the obedience of faith, without insight on their part.'⁴⁷

The Reformation broke this spiritual servitude, at least in northern Europe. The medieval system had undoubtedly played an educative role, but by the sixteenth century European man was 'coming of age' and ready to enter upon the inheritance of freedom which as a Christian was essentially his. And it was the voice of freedom that the Reformers raised. The secular life, life in the world, was no longer seen as a foreign sphere inimical to the soul's health but as one in which, pre-eminently, modern man could realise his potentialities as a free being. The family and civil society at last won unstinting recognition of their worth and autonomy, whilst by contrast the life of the Church was discovered to be sensuous rather than spiritual, that the external 'in a course and material form was enshrined in its inmost being'. In fact materialism and loss of freedom went hand in hand, 'for spirit, having renounced its proper nature in its most essential quality, and having sacrificed its characteristic liberty to a mere sensual object – [had] lost its freedom, and was held in adamant bond to what is alien to itself'.⁴⁸ The Reformation of the sixteenth century however was able to attain both freedom and spirituality, no longer fearing either the secular world or a 'sacral' order that had become materialised. The moving principle of the age was that of *faith*, conceived not as an assurance of merely finite things but as a conviction of the reality of the eternal, of the absolute truth of God; though what Lutheran teaching repudiated was not so much the substance of Catholicism as its characteristic attitudes, The Reformers' emphasis was on the reconciling spirit of Christ, who is not to be regarded as an individual in a distant past but as one with whom, by faith, man sustains an immediate relationship in the spirit. The Reformation made it possible for every man to see more clearly how he may accomplish the work of reconciliation within his own soul. 'Subjective spirit has to

receive the spirit of truth into itself: and give it a dwelling-place there.⁴⁹ Thus was Christian freedom realised and the universal truth upheld that man by his very nature is destined to be free.

Nevertheless such freedom was not at once achieved in fact. Protestantism itself tended to sink back into the externalism of the old Catholic system, equating faith with assent to theological formularies. But though to some extent mitigated by the Pietist movement this new scholasticism was soon to be countered by the rationalism of the *Aufklärung*, a new phase in European culture brought about by the growth of science and the critical spirit. The mark of the eighteenth century, the so-called Age of Reason, was an abstract 'liberalism' in every sphere of thought.⁵⁰ Its source of origin Hegel judged to be France, though it rapidly passed over into Germany, creating there also a new world of ideas. 'The absolute criterion — taking the place of all authority based on religious belief and positive laws of Right (especially political Right) — is the verdict passed by Mind itself on that which is to be believed or obeyed.' The Enlightenment thus sought to banish everything speculative from the human realm no less than from the divine. The French Revolution, with its doctrine of the Rights of Man, was the typical movement of the age, giving practical effect to the principles inherent in the whole eighteenth-century conception of 'reason'. But it is a concept, Hegel urges, which fails to satisfy the living spirit, 'the concrete human soul', and its outcome can only be agnosticism and pessimism. What has now to be done — for Hegel's survey has at length come down to his own day — is to reassess the true content of Christianity in the light of mankind's total need and capacity. The Enlightenment had proved salutary in its negative aspect: it had revealed itself as man's own 'better sense' not least in its revolt against the constricting superstitions of much orthodox religion. But on its positive side its limitations had become obvious. Indeed orthodoxy and rationalism had all too much in common. Both mistook the real nature of the Christian religion by supposing that it had somehow to depend on the truth of an external or 'supernatural' order disclosing itself only in particular and special occurrences. Thus while orthodoxy rested faith on miracles, rationalism, by repudiating the miraculous, perforce denied faith. Neither saw religion for what it properly is, and each wasted its energies on futile enquiries and controversies.

5 Man's Knowledge of God

(i) THE QUESTION OF INTUITION

I have said that Hegel may justly be regarded as the founder of the philosophy of religion as a systematic study. His interest in religion was indeed so strong that it is scarcely an exaggeration to claim that his entire scheme of thought was in a sense a vindication of the religious consciousness as affording a unique insight into the nature of reality.¹ Yet given the great variety in the historical forms of religion itself the question one is moved to ask is whether it is possible to discover in them a common basis. No doubt to speak in this way of the 'basis' of religion is somewhat vague. Thus each of the great positive religions has its own historical origins, which can be accounted for in more or less precise factual terms, even when allowing for the claim of at least some of them to have been divinely revealed. It is much the same too in the case of the individual, whose personal religious faith may depend on a whole nexus of circumstances largely peculiar to himself. But what Hegel has in mind is something deeper, as also more general, than this. His presiding interest is that neither of the historian nor the psychologist nor the sociologist, but of the philosopher. Religion at any level is a human phenomenon and hence must have some kind of bearing on man's destiny as a rational being. Not that its pursuit must imply an uninterrupted advance towards truth, for here as elsewhere the history of human ideas and beliefs shows only too plainly that mankind's intellectual progress over the ages has been ceaselessly dogged by error and illusion. Hegel's concern, rather, is to examine the nature of religious thinking and to

comprehend its overall role in man's quest for self-understanding.

The religious outlook in its primitive state is described by him as pre-reflective. As we noted in an earlier chapter, he emphasises that religion is *lived* before ever it becomes the subject of reasoned contemplation, and that its certitude is spontaneous and immediate. But how are we to understand this immediacy? Is it enough to say of it that it is 'intuitive' — for what does intuition itself mean? Does the word denote a *feeling* simply, or have we to recognise at least an element of rational judgement? Hegel himself will admit some degree of difference between intuitive or instinctive thinking and 'reasoning' in the proper sense; between belief resting on a kind of inward perception and 'knowledge' based on reflective understanding. Thus he allows the truth of the claim that we have immediate knowledge of the fact that God *is*, quite apart from the diverse forms — myths, dogmas, rites, institutions — under which the religious consciousness may become articulate.² And in his opinion it is this immediate apprehension of God which constitutes the common basis of all religions.

It is interesting to compare Hegel's position here with that of Kant. The latter's critical philosophy was to have a far-reaching effect upon the logic of all future thinking about the religious problem, an effect which in the eyes of many, however, could amount to a total scepticism; but it can hardly be doubted that Kant himself, in his sternly moralistic way, was a man of deep religious conviction, the roots of which lay in the pietism in which he was brought up and the influence of which he never completely shed.³ Thus his idea of God was in itself little different from that of ordinary Protestant belief, and although he was at pains to show that divine existence is incapable of logical demonstration, he did so not from any negative motive but in order, as he himself said, to make room for faith.⁴ The real ground of belief for him was in the simple assurance, indeed the native sense, of God, which he held that all men actually, if in varying measure, possess. Certainly faith ought never to be looked on as the special privilege of a specially gifted few, and in practice the question of whether God's existence can or cannot be proved is not important. What counts is the testimony of the virtually universal *sensus communis*. This of course should in no way obscure the truth that divine existence is

incapable of being instantiated by pure reason, even if the idea itself be seen to have an entirely proper function as a regulative principle necessitated by the mind's inherent demand for unity. It is only that the criteria of rational proof do not apply outside the realm of phenomena. But this conclusion by no means implies that belief in a divine being — as also in freedom and immortality — is incompatible with reason; and, as is well known, Kant does find some sort of rational grounding for it in what he calls the 'practical reason', or moral faith. Nevertheless, the argument from practical reason is not of a kind to appeal to all minds, and where it fails to persuade, agnosticism might appear the only alternative; which is why Kant himself falls back on the notion of a natural intimation of the divine, albeit in the shape of an assumption which we can never be in a position to justify.⁵

Hegel however is very much concerned to clarify the meaning of 'natural intimation', and at this point his attention fastens on two contemporaries of his for whom the intuitive approach was the only possible one, viz. Jacobi and Schleiermacher.

The elder of these, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi — he was born in 1753 — was himself a good deal influenced by Kant, even though set on refuting him.⁶ He fully shared Kant's view that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated by strictly logical argument, but he was not prepared to restrict faith to the realm of morality or to found it simply on the sense of duty. On the contrary, he would have it extended over the whole world of the suprasensible, which he believed to be open to a kind of 'spiritual feeling' (*Geistesgefühl*). To attempt to prove divine existence on purely rational lines would be, he maintained, to reduce it to the level of finite things by making it dependent on something other than itself — a form of atheism. Nor did Jacobi derive any satisfaction from Kant's theory of the postulates, which he saw only as a thinly disguised form of rationalism. For here God becomes no more than an abstract idea, the sole purpose of which is to lend support to ethics: as a 'religious' reality he has no place whatever in Kant's system. In any case it is useless to try to discover the Unconditioned by way of the conditioned. For God is not an inference but a fact, a 'given', altogether independent of the individual. Indeed it is truer to say that he acts in regard to us rather than we in regard to him. But if God is not an inference, then, if apprehended at all, he

must be apprehended *directly*. And it is this direct apprehension which Jacobi means by faith. It is, he affirms, 'an original, inner revelation, nothing other than a sense of the suprasensible'.| As physical sensation is entirely positive and conveys only its object, so is it with the spiritual sense or 'reason'; for reason and faith — provided we understand reason correctly — are one. Though in saying this Jacobi is neither endorsing Kant's 'rational faith' nor admitting the dogmatism of Lutheran orthodoxy, but insisting rather that an inward and immediate sense of God's presence is rightly to be described as knowledge. For we know God with the same directness as we know ourselves, even though it remains true that were God known in the way of rational comprehension he would not be God.

Jacobi's theory of faith is thus essentially intuitional. To believe, he holds, is much more an instinctive than a discursive act. He even calls it 'an instinct for the Absolute'.

Yes, an instinct. For instinct alone sees truly, alone derives its knowledge direct from the source. It is the spirit of God. In the animal world instinct is a kind of prophecy; and it is the same with mankind, only in a higher form. Instinct leads an animal to look for and find what it wants without actually knowing it. . . . Man too is looking for something — but something invisible which he also does not know, and of which he has the feeling only from the need he experiences: the need proper to a mind the essence of which is the knowledge that he does not have his being from himself and that he exists solely by grace of another, apart from whom his life would cease.⁷

Hence the utter certitude of faith: the condition of mind of one who really believes is more or less passive, open to receive immediate impressions of that divine being by which his whole existence is enveloped. If we can be said to seek God it is because he already has found us. And if we have any idea at all of God it is because we are his creatures, made in his image and after his likeness. Were he not present already in our hearts, what is there, outside of himself, that could show him to us?⁸ Jacobi even argues that our knowledge of the external world is similarly a matter of faith; for it too depends on direct contact: we 'feel' that we have a body, and we know with an equal

certainty that other bodies exist, before ever we 'reason' the fact. And although he personally was critical of Kant's epistemology, he remarks that Kant himself postulates (or actualises by faith) a material 'thing-in-itself' (*Ding-an-sich*) prior to and necessary for that 'phenomenal' knowledge which alone is properly rational.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) had already been teaching theology at Berlin University for some years when Hegel was appointed to the chair of philosophy there in 1818, and he enjoyed an established reputation in both the academic and ecclesiastical spheres. His best-known published work at that time was still his *Speeches on Religion*, the first edition of which had appeared in 1799.⁹ The essence of religion, he maintains, is neither doctrine nor ritual but *experience*, and its roots lie deep in the emotional life, below the level of reason or the moral conscience. Religion, he states, is 'the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal'. The religious man's aim is 'to seek this and find it in all that lives and moves, in all growth and change, in all doing and suffering'. Religious reality is 'to have life and to know life in immediate feeling, only as such an existence in the Infinite and Eternal'.¹⁰ And Schleiermacher goes on to emphasise that it is neither knowledge in its usual sense nor science, whether of the world or of God, but is basically an affection, a sentiment. Words, however, he thinks, cannot adequately describe it, and he himself, amid much poetical rhetoric,¹¹ has to use a variety of expressions in order to indicate what he means: intuition, awareness, immediate perception, contemplation, feeling.¹² But, as is well known, he also qualifies his description of religion as feeling (*Gefühl*) with words 'of absolute dependence'.

What precisely Schleiermacher meant by this has of course been much discussed, but he quite certainly does not imply dependence on the external world or human society, however powerfully these do in fact condition man's existence. *Finite* dependence involves reciprocity of action: if persons act in respect of me, so too do I in respect of them; I may be weak in many ways, but I have my strength as well. In any case modern man at least is not so immediately dependent on his physical environment as were his early ancestors, because through

advancing knowledge he has learned to control it. Moreover the sort of dependence Schleiermacher conceives of is *absolute*, not relative; something therefore which affects out total being and which we can relate only to a transcendent cause — 'the *whence* of our receptive and active existence', to use a phrase from his later work, *The Christian Faith*. Such a form of apprehension is distinct but undefined, and altogether in advance of theological or philosophical articulation. 'In the first instance God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant in this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state; and any further content of the idea must be evolved out of this fundamental import.'¹³

In short, the beginning of religion is an intuition of the infinite transcendence from which our entire existence derives; and indeed a man can be said to be genuinely religious only in so far as he participates in that experience. The forms under which, historically, it is bodied forth were bound to differ, thus giving rise to the varying positive religions; but they all, so Schleiermacher claims, rest on the same ultimate ground — a conclusion upon which both he and Jacobi are agreed. At first glance therefore, it would appear to offer nothing to which Hegel likewise would not subscribe. Yet he does not endorse it. Why?

(ii) HEGEL'S CRITICISM OF JACOBI AND SCHLEIERMACHER

Hegel's interest in Jacobi's thought was aroused quite early on in his career, but, although in his later years the adverse opinion he had formed of it was somewhat modified, he remained critical. He was prepared, that is, to follow Jacobi to some extent. Immediate or intuitive knowledge of God is to be admitted as an element in all religion, provided we do not assume it to be the actual starting-point, historically or psychologically, of any of the great religious traditions. For the philosopher it may serve as a regulative idea without its being taken for an historic fact. Unfortunately it is to the way in which Jacobi argues his case that Hegel objects. For although Jacobi dwells much on the inadequacy of rational categories when applied to the divine reality he himself does not forgo

reason in order to justify his general assertion that religion rests on *nothing but* intuition. One cannot have it both ways — at once to denigrate reason and yet make full use of it in argument. Furthermore, if intuition, or 'faith' (in Jacobi's term), is really to be taken as religion's sole ground we should be told what precisely it is that such faith yields. Does it, or can it, at this primal level give any knowledge at all of what biblical religion calls the 'living God'? An immediate consciousness of God, says Hegel, goes no farther than to tell us *that* he is; to tell us *what* he is would be an act of cognition, involving mediation, so that God as an object is expressly narrowed down to the indeterminate suprasensible, 'God-in-general', and the significance of religion is reduced to a minimum.¹⁴ Faith, on this showing, cannot be said to amount to very much, whereas Jacobi, in using so evocative a word, would seem to posit faith in the full and true sense. Accordingly his religious philosophy is made to acquire 'a thoroughly orthodox and Christian look, on the strength of which it takes the liberty of uttering its arbitrary dicta with greater pretension and authority'.¹⁵ Again, although immediate knowledge or intuition may well be claimed by individuals this in itself is no guarantee that it is a possession of mankind as a whole. How then can it constitute the sole basis of religion the world over? Certainly Jacobi is not justified in arguing for anything so vague and subjective as the firm ground on which all religion rests. His contention has in fact more in common with pietistic *Schwärmerei* (as Kant dubbed it), or even deistic 'natural religion' than with the Christianity of the historic creeds. At best the faith which Jacobi has in mind 'has no other authority than that of a personal revelation', whereas the Christian faith is 'a copious body of objective truth, a system of knowledge and doctrine'.¹⁶

But to Hegel the fundamental weakness of Jacobi's theory is its failure to understand the nature and scope of reason itself. For what Jacobi means by reason is simply the old-style metaphysical notion of *analytical reasoning*, a procedure no doubt indispensable in its place but one which stops short at particular conclusions and judgments, regarded as so many ideas discrete and independent, even when not mutually contradictory and exclusive. Like any thinker of the age of *Aufklärung* he completely overlooks the truth that antagonism is possible only because of an underlying unity in virtue of which the

opposing terms are inescapably related. Thus his rigid separation of immediate knowledge from knowledge which is mediated or reasoned leads him to the erroneous view that it is by the former alone that the Absolute becomes accessible to us. The 'distinctive doctrine' that 'immediate knowledge only, to the total exclusion of mediation, can possess a content which is true', is all that he has to offer.¹⁷ Not having thought the matter through, he does not see that immediacy and mediation are actually inseparable. Had he done so, had he rigorously examined his own notion of immediacy, he would not have been so blind to the difficulties it presents. For what after all does immediacy mean? To say that a thing is 'immediate' is to imply that it exists purely in itself, excluding all differentiation (which would of course involve mediation).¹⁸ In other words, it can enter into no possible relationship, either internal or external. But clearly any such idea is wholly abstract; pure immediacy can exist for thought alone, and then as no more than an isolated conceptual 'moment'. So too with immediate knowledge; for even granting that bare intuition is in principle conceivable, it must in practice inevitably issue in reasoning, pass over into immediacy or reflection. Hence the very idea of knowledge or representation, purpose or activity — in fact anything at all that can be recognised as a truly human or *spiritual* act — which is not inherently mediate or reflective, has to be ruled out. And it is the function of philosophy to show why. For although the actual process of reasoning may not be explicit, and may even be obscure or concealed, it nonetheless is there; an 'intuitive' knowledge, so-called, from which rationality were *ex hypothesi* excluded would be no knowledge at all. And this goes no less for an 'intuitive' knowledge of God. As Hegel puts it:

The essential and real universal, when taken merely in its immediacy, is a bare abstract universal; and from this point of view God is in that case only a phrase; for the consciousness and self-consciousness which spirit implies are impossible without a distinguishing of it both from itself and from something else, i.e. without mediation.¹⁹

Hegel's criticisms of Jacobi apply equally well to Schleiermacher, but it is the former who receives the closer attention,

since in Hegel's opinion he has stated the intuitional view with most force. But Hegel is not at all unappreciative of the elevation of Schleiermacher's thought in a number of important respects, and notably his identification — at least in the *Speeches* — of the Absolute with the Universum or reality as a whole. For the most part, however, the relationship between the two men personally was not cordial. Hegel had little sympathy with Schleiermacher's emotionalism and seldom missed an opportunity to attack what he referred to rather contemptuously as his 'theology of feeling'. Schleiermacher's famous description of religion as a sense of absolute dependence he treated as a joke. Were this notion correct, he once observed, 'a dog would be the best Christian, since it possesses this feeling of "salvation" when it hungers for a bone!'²⁰ Emotion therefore is not to be raised to a principle, even in religion, and manifestly not in theology, which claims to be scientific. In fact Hegel questions whether man has a natural *feeling* for the divine at all.

The divine is only in and for the spirit, and the spirit is . . . not a natural life but the state of having been reborn. If feelings are to constitute the basic condition of the essence of man, then he would be on the same level as the animals, for it is inherent in animals to have their condition in, and to live according to, feelings.²¹

To follow mere feeling is to make it impossible to speak of the Absolute in any determinate and therefore intelligible way. It can be relegated to the realm of pure subjectivity, where communication breaks down. The result is a virtual atheism: 'What has its root only in my feelings is for me alone; it is mine, but not its own; it has no independent existence in and for itself.'²²

But in criticising intuition thus can Hegel exempt his own idea of a *pre-reflective* stage of the religious consciousness? And if not where would he have us look for that common basis of all religions which he himself believes to be a fact. To this it can only be replied that he remains convinced that a pre-reflective knowledge or apprehension of God can and must be assumed.²³ If he finds fault with Jacobi and Schleiermacher it is not to *deny* immediate knowledge but rather to make clear what

exactly it is that the student of religion should understand by it. The subject is a complex one and careful analysis is required. But one thing at least is certain: the role of reason is always operative and must never be overlooked.

It is then entirely appropriate, so Hegel considers, to speak of a knowledge of the divine which is spontaneous, original and (in a sense) immediate. Yet mediation, as the processes of discursive thinking, is always implicit in it. We can see this plainly enough from our experience of the world around us. Our knowledge here is not just a matter of sensation; thought permeates it through and through. Thus the 'existing mass of things' which we cognise as the 'world' is further determined by the categories of thought into 'finitude', 'contingency', 'imperfection' and the like. We realise, that is, that the components of the 'universe' are limited, contingent and transient. And it is this realisation, indeed this inevitable reaction, to things as we know them which impels our minds towards what lies beyond them, to recognise that 'the world of finitude, of things temporal, of change, of transitoriness, is not the true form of existence, but the Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable'. And although these coldly metaphysical terms may fail to express the wealth of personal meaning which the word 'God' contains, it still is true that by it we also necessarily signify the attributes without which God would not be God. 'Thus the spirit rises at least to those divine predicates or fundamental qualities of his nature which, though abstract, are yet universal, or at least to that universal region, to the pure aether, in which God dwells.'²⁴ What we designate as religion is, in its final meaning, really nothing other than this 'elevation of the soul to God'. And the starting-point from which man rises to the divine is his sense of finitude. He judges contingent and limited being to be in the last resort 'untrue being, above and beyond which true Being exists'.

Yet this insight, or apprehension, or 'common sense', or 'heart's revelation' — call it what you will — is a great deal more than mere feeling. Certainly it has the quality of spontaneity, in that it is not, at the outset, self-reflective: it will not as yet have been intellectually categorised; or in Hegelian phraseology, it will still be only *an sich*, 'in itself', not *für sich*, 'for itself'. However, such categorisation is latent and implicit; time and circumstances will inevitably activate it. 'In short', says Hegel,

'religion and morals, however they may be of the nature of faith or immediate knowledge, are still on every side conditioned by the mediating process which is termed development, education, training.'²⁵ Without this there can be no fully *conscious* exaltation of the mind to God, even though the partially conscious process may already have begun. For man is essentially a thinker. 'The rise of thought beyond the world of sense, its passage from the finite to the infinite, the leap into the supersensible which it takes when it snaps asunder the chain of sense — all this transition is thought and nothing but thought.' Were there no such transition there would be no thinking. Animals do not make it, as they never (Hegel supposes) get further than sensation; and the consequence is they have no religion.²⁶

But that we do have a pre-reflective knowledge of God in the form of an inner experience cannot be doubted, and it is 'concrete' enough to have in it elements alike of feeling, intuition and imagination. This means of course that accidental and arbitrary elements are also present, since the experience is always relative to the individual subject.²⁷ Yet in this experience, compounded though it is of imagination, emotion and even mere sensation, thought rises to thought; there is 'an elevation of the thinking spirit to that which is the highest thought, to God'.²⁸ And it is rooted, Hegel maintains, in the very nature of the human mind itself, and hence is necessary to it, so that if we are to talk about 'proving' divine existence — and the scope and force of such reasoning will shortly come under discussion — it can really be nothing other than to demonstrate this necessity. It is not, that is, a matter of proving something from outside, as it were: man's ascent to God is self-justifying because it is necessary.²⁹ Those who set much store by intuition are correct therefore to remind us of its spontaneous character and to warn us not to be deterred by any failure of the abstract understanding to provide clinching arguments. 'Faith will not allow itself to be robbed of its right in rising to God, and thus of its own witness to truth.' Moreover because this Godward impulsion of the mind is natural to man we should also see it as universal. Philosophical reasoning in explanation and clarification of it, may not of course be common among men, but what matters is the impulsion, the exaltation itself, whatever form it may take, be it abstract—

metaphysical or concrete—imaginative. Though the experience itself — we should not forget — always involves mediation.³⁰

These considerations bring us to the old argument from the *consensus gentium*, which goes back at least to Cicero.³¹ Needless to say, it cannot be shown empirically that belief in God is and ever has been a universal fact. The word 'God' itself, historically speaking, carries far too wide a connotation to justify so categorical a statement. But the argument in its broad aim is not without weight and may fairly be used to support the claim that a belief so generally held is one of the basic principles of human thinking. Man, it could be said, has in him a 'natural' sense of God, an inherent capacity to 'know' God with an ever deepening power of rational understanding.

All the same, to disregard the implicitly discursive element in such knowledge, concentrating wholly upon 'intuition', as Jacobi and Schleiermacher appear to do, is to miss the truth. Religion the world over springs from an intimation of the divine which at first is largely emotional and conditioned by factors of temperament, cultural tradition and so on. Yet behind all these, Hegel would insist, there is a consistency of attitude which is determined by man's basic urge to pass over from the finite to the infinite, from the contingent to the absolute; although it is not a merely blind urge, for reason will already have started on its work of questioning and judging.³²

(iii) CAN GOD'S EXISTENCE BE PROVED?

Let us grant, then, that man has a primal belief in God which may not unreasonably be called intuitive. One says 'not reasonably' because recognition of the fact is itself an act of the reflective intelligence; which suggests again that intuition alone is not enough to constitute an understanding of God and certainly not enough to provide the credal content of a developed religion. It had however become a settled tenet of eighteenth-century pietism that the *sentiment* of God's being and presence in life was sufficient in itself and that rational reflection *about* faith was actually to be avoided as a danger to faith. Thought was capable of establishing one thing only, namely its own incapacity to grasp and penetrate divine truth.³³ Moreover the upholders of 'faith alone' as the sole way to God were prompt also to point out that philosophers

themselves have now come to doubt the logical cogency of the so-called proofs of divine existence. But, as we have seen, this sentimentalist view is one for which Hegel can discover no grounds. We are, he says, bound to reason about our faith, if only to ask whether and how far intuition itself is authentic and trustworthy.³⁴ For even Jacobi finds it necessary to discuss faith in a rational way, to the extent indeed of seeking to build a religious philosophy upon it. It will of course be maintained that the strength of intuition is that it is self-justifying – that in by-passing inferential reasoning it carries truth directly into the mind. Nevertheless the intuitionist, when questioned, still feels it necessary to supply a reasoned answer, since if emotional satisfaction is sufficient where faith is concerned, it still is natural to wish to comprehend how this is so. Given, therefore, that religion is not to be divorced from rational thinking, is it possible to go further and ask whether at least the existence of God cannot be known by purely rational means? We should note, however, that Hegel admits justice in the complaint that the classical proofs have fallen into such discredit 'that they pass for something antiquated, belonging to the metaphysics of days gone by – a barren desert, out of which we have escaped and brought ourselves back to a living faith'.³⁵

But if rationality is implicit in intuition, so that the latter may fairly be described as 'immediate mediation', then some sort of proof is already at hand.³⁶ If, more precisely, the immediacy of our knowledge consists in the mind's spontaneous leap from the finite and contingent to the absolute and infinite, then the process of demonstration could be no more than an analysis of the actual reasoning involved. As Hegel observes, the proofs of God's divine existence originate in the need to satisfy consciously inquiring thought. The mind's elevation to God is therefore something quite natural; all that philosophy has to do is to show in strictly rational terms what it comprises – whence it starts, how it proceeds and whither it tends. Reflection of itself adds nothing of substance to what is already present in pre-reflective experience, only bringing into the clear light of reason what at first was hidden and obscure.³⁷ In particular it explains the *necessity* of the mind's elevation, since to *prove* is to show that a certain inference or series of inferences is rationally unavoidable. Thus religious sentiment, Hegel urges, has no occasion to be afraid of knowledge. ('The determinateness

of feeling, the content of the heart, ought to have a substantial form'.) For knowledge is simply the unfolding or laying bare of the content of experience and its objective movement — in a word, its intrinsic logical determinism.³⁸

Proof, then, in the sense in which the word is used here, is simply the elucidation of a process which in essence the mind has already carried through. Such of course is not the only kind of proof, as we know from the sciences; but scientific proofs are merely part of the methodology of knowledge;³⁹ they may be described as 'subjective' in that they are relative to the special interest or purpose one happens to have in view and are not constitutive of the object in itself.⁴⁰ Mathematics no doubt offers us the clearest examples, but there is also the whole range of empirical proofs, of which historical proof is only an extension. When however it comes to proving divine existence, what we have to consider is something objective — 'the consciousness of the proper movement of the object in itself'.⁴¹ Or to put it otherwise, out of an inner experience in which purely personal elements are inevitably intermingled we have to highlight those features that are *logically* necessary to it. Hence the *saltum*, which the mind here naturally makes, and which is commonly denoted by the word 'faith', is to be studied in strict conformity with the demands of philosophical thought — always remembering that proof does not *validate* the experience but only details its components. It may, Hegel suggests, actually fall short of fulfilling its task because the experience itself eludes precise logical analysis.⁴³

It is noteworthy that the attempt to demonstrate God's existence has assumed a variety of forms. This is no more than we should expect in view of the fact that man's evolving sense of the divine being does not follow a uniform pattern. Different individuals will be affected in different ways. Faith is a personal thing, conditioned by temperament and circumstances, and the reality of God, as faith projects it, is inseparable from our own subjectivity. But this diversity is objective as well as subjective and relates to the data which have to be taken into consideration. It is because of 'the infinite number of starting points' from which it is possible to advance to God that there are so many 'essential transitions having the force of proofs'.⁴⁴ In this respect religious thinking shows itself to be more complex than that of science because more dependent on the differing

perspectives in which its central object may be viewed. Yet although the forms of proof are many, underlying them there is a consistency of principle which philosophical reflection quickly brings into focus, and philosophers and theologians have in fact reduced all such arguments to a few distinct types. Of these the most immediately striking is probably that which claims to demonstrate the Absolute from the world's contingency (*Zufälligkeit*).^{4 5} We may therefore best begin our examination of the 'classical' proofs with the so called *Cosmological Argument*. Here Hegel's particular concern will be to see how successfully this well-known piece of reasoning translates into philosophical terms that 'elevation of the soul to God' of which he has been speaking.

At the outset Hegel recognises, as we have noted, the widespread impression that the formal proofs of divine existence are fallacious and must now be abandoned, and indeed in the form in which they are criticised by Kant they are not, he agrees, cogent. But he points out that Kant himself appears to have understood the nature of these arguments in much the same way as did the old-style metaphysics which he rejects, whereas the whole method of approach must be reassessed if they are once again to carry weight.

Consider first what contingency itself means. A contingent being, it may be said, is one that need *not* have existed; but the universe is made up of such beings: they do not exist of their own accord, and they pass away again because of their inherent weakness and instability. Each has its cause or causes, external to itself, and each is dependent on things other than itself, so that every such being is limited by the other beings that condition it. But if this is the case it would seem that contingency includes necessity also: contingent beings are what they are because they are so determined — the conditions under which they exist impose on them a form which they cannot escape. In other words, necessity and contingency co-exist *in the same things*. But the necessity is not absolute any more than the contingency is total. The prevailing conditions, that is to say, determine what results from them to be of a certain kind, though precisely of *what* kind depends on facts which *per se* are particular and limited. Absolute necessity, according to Hegel, is such that it 'no longer goes beyond itself, but is in-and-for itself, included within itself, and is determined as complete in itself,

while all other determinations are posited by it and are dependent on it'.⁴⁶ But, if this is what necessity in all strictness means, it could be argued that God, not being dependent on anything – and hence free of the necessity that accompanies contingency – is the only truly contingent being there is. On the other hand he also is the only necessary being because he alone exists by virtue of what he is in himself. (It was thus that the medieval philosophers spoke of his *aseity*.)

The cosmological proof – that if anything exists under the conditions of contingency, then an absolutely necessary being must also exist in order to account for it – was thought by Kant to have considerable force, not merely for the ordinary man but for the intellectually sophisticated as well. Its appeal lies in the fact that it starts from an indubitable experience and is not, like the ontological proof, completely *a priori*. Nevertheless Kant finds hidden within it 'a whole nest of dialectical assumptions' which his transcendental criticism has no difficulty, he thinks, in detecting and exposing.⁴⁷ The defects of the argument, as he sees them are (1) that it proves, if anything, only the existence of a necessary being, and not the God, complete in all his perfections, of Christian theism, and (2) that in order to make good the difference it has to fall back on the ontological argument, which expressly turns on the definition of God as *perfect* being.

That the proof *a contingentia mundi* on the face of it demonstrates no more than a necessary being Hegel, in reply, allows, and the Christian idea of God certainly goes far beyond that. Yet that God *necessarily* exists is unquestionably a component of the Christian idea of him, because when the concept is analysed speculatively one can see that infinity is bound up with it.⁴⁸ Kant therefore is clearly wrong in asserting that the cosmological proof rests on the ontological.⁴⁹ But Kant's next point of objection is that the cosmological proof in arguing from contingency to necessity is making use of a principle – namely, causality – which, although applicable within the world of sense, has no meaning at all outside it.⁵⁰ Here again however Hegel dissents, for why should not causality hold good for being of any kind, ultraphenomenal as well as phenomenal?

As a matter of fact [he says], it is by means of this

intellectual category of contingency that the temporal world as present to perception is conceived of; and by employing this very category, which is an intellectual one, thought has already passed beyond the world of sense, and transferred itself to another sphere.⁵¹

To Kant's further objection that in deducing a necessary being a *contingentia mundi* the argument makes such a being dependent on the universe, thus subjecting the supposedly unconditioned to conditions – a manifest contradiction – Hegel replies that because *conceptually* we have to implicate God in a system of logical relations it does not follow that he therefore ceases to be the one and only self-subsistent reality. Kant is simply confusing the realm of being with that of thought.⁵²

But although Hegel thus rebuts some of Kant's criticisms he himself is far from endorsing the familiar rational theology, since he is quite unable to accept its assumptions. The traditional form of the cosmological argument takes it for granted that contingent being has a substantive existence of its own, and that it is from this that we infer necessary being. We have as it were two orders of being juxtaposed, with necessary being (God) in some sense 'outside' the cosmos, from which indeed his transcendence completely excludes him. According to this view he has to be conceived of as the wholly *Other* whose reality, unlike that of all contingent existences, is entirely self-subsisting. Yet if the universe is as real as its Creator how can the latter be described as infinite? Is not his 'infinity' limited by what he himself has brought into being? The only way out of this difficulty, in Hegel's opinion, is to understand the true meaning of contingency as something essentially negative in character, evidenced by its instability and transience. Contingent being, that is, is intrinsically self-negating. As Hegel more than once puts it, 'the upward spring of mind' indicates that the world's being is only a semblance, without ultimate reality or absolute truth. In fact 'unless the being of the world is nullified, the *point d'appui* for the exaltation is lost'.⁵³

Properly speaking, therefore, it is incorrect to call the cosmological argument a proof, because its premises and its conclusion are not commensurable. The contingency of the world is not a *positive* fact since the universe, as we have just said, has not a fully substantive existence. Compared with the

uniquely necessary being, the Absolute, it assumes more and more the character of *non-being*, in which case the Absolute ceases to be a part of the sum total of reality and becomes — what in truth it is — the *whole* of it, with nothing whatsoever outside it. What we describe as contingent being has, accordingly, no independent existence but is simply an aspect of the Absolute. Hegel's conclusion is that the value of the cosmological proof lies simply in its attempt to bring into consciousness what the inner life of the spirit demands — something which, subjectively considered, is rightly designated 'religious elevation.'⁵⁴

Hegel turns next to the Teleological Argument, or, as Kant calls it, the Physico-theological. This rests less on the contingency of the universe than on its finality or teleology — on relations, that is, which appear to involve cosmic *design*.⁵⁵ But here again the starting-point is empirical reality, and, in particular, the evidence it may be said to present of purposive contrivance — 'clear traces or indications of a wise arrangement in accordance with ends'. The world, the argument submits, is full of living things implicitly organised and rendered cunningly dependent on their inorganic environment in an harmonious relationship. Moreover nature would also appear to be arranged with special reference to man.⁵⁶ Confronted by the evidences of universal order and purpose the mind's immediate impulse is to look for their source. The argument in question is basically therefore an attempt to rationalise this prompting, and as such Kant is by no means unimpressed by it; it must always, he says, be mentioned with respect. 'It is the oldest and simplest proof of all, and never fails to commend itself to the popular mind. It imparts life to the study of nature, as it was itself suggested by that study, and receives new vigour from it.'⁵⁷ Nevertheless it cannot, he maintains, claim demonstrative certainty. Indeed, like the cosmological argument, it needs the backing of the ontological 'in order to make up for its own deficiency'. It establishes nothing definite about the 'Supreme Cause' or Creator of the universe, but at most points only to an *architect*, 'very much limited by the adaptability of the material in which he works'. Certainly he need not be an infinitely perfect being.

Again however Hegel is not fully convinced by Kant's reasoning. He doubts whether the physico-theological proof is

the oldest: the ancient Greeks — and the argument, he suggests, is first met with on the lips of Xenophon's Socrates⁵⁸ — were moved by what they saw as the power of God, before reflecting on his wisdom.⁵⁹ The form of things, in other words, is more readily grasped by the mind than their content, content in fact being inconceivable without form.⁶⁰ Further, if in resting the argument on the cosmological proof it is contended (as by Jacobi) that the unconditioned is made subject to conditions, then the objection calls for the same answer as before, namely that the *ordo cognoscendi* is not the *ordo essendi*: the process of our thinking necessarily starts from the conditioned, although in reality it is the unconditioned on which the conditioned depends. If the teleological argument begins with what look like 'teleological arrangements' it is because these have been *established by* God and are not an *a priori* to which he merely conforms.⁶¹

Criticisms such as these do not, all the same, take us to the root of the matter. As with the cosmological argument so with the teleological: its statement (and therefore its effectiveness) depends on one's philosophical standpoint. Kant's objections to it are doubtless from his point of view justified. But if further examination of the argument is to be worth while we must consider the meaning of teleology itself; for here as in the case of the cosmological proof it is the underlying assumption that has to be scrutinised. The term *teleology*, says Hegel, is capable of two distinct interpretations, an 'external' and an 'internal'. An external teleology places finite things in a relationship that is not intrinsic but only accidental: purpose and design are *imposed* upon them, so that the connection of ends and means is mechanical only. 'We use a certain material in order to carry out our ends, since the activity and the material are different'.⁶² Internal teleology, on the other hand, is organic, relating the parts to the whole in mutual dependence. Here 'the end accomplishes itself through its own activity and thus comes into harmony with itself in the process of realizing itself. . . . The truth of the determination of the end consists in the fact that the end has its means within itself, as also the material in which it realizes itself'.⁶³ Its purposiveness is, in a word, *immanent*. Those who take the external view of teleology argue, truly enough, that a living organism, if it is to survive, requires certain conditions which it cannot itself pro-

vide. But they go on to suggest that these necessary conditions are brought about by a 'third something' — i.e. a designing intelligence — which secures and maintains the unity of the organism and its environment.⁶⁴ This designing intelligence must therefore be seen as altogether *apart* from both the ends which it sets itself and the means which it contrives for their realisation. The *cause* of the teleological sequence will entirely transcend the sequence itself, whose *telos* accordingly will not be intrinsic to it — a conclusion which at once raises difficulties. The detailed evidences of design are made much of by those who press this argument, but all too often they ignore what seems to contradict their case, or at least not to bear it out. Nature obviously is very far from being always beneficent, but we also have to consider man's own failings.

The life of the largest part of living things is based on the destruction of other living things; and the same holds good of higher ends. If we traverse the domain of morality, and go on even to the highest range, namely civil life, and then consider whether the ends here are realized or not, we shall find indeed that much is attained but that still more is rendered abortive and destroyed by the passion and wickedness of men, even when seeking the highest and most exalted ends.⁶⁵

Again, an 'extrinsic' teleology tends to assume that the inorganic world has as such no independent reality, the organic being attached to it as it were from without, so that, apparently, it is a mere matter of chance whether or not the organic happens to have the right conditions for its existence; whereas in fact 'man is certain that he is related to the rest of nature as an end', and that, so far as he is concerned, nature is only a means.⁶⁶

A third point of criticism is this (and it is one that touches Kant particularly): even when it is agreed that all immediate and limited ends are to be subordinated to one supreme end, namely the Good, yet to place this universal moral objective in the perspective of an external teleology is to see it only as something 'outside' human life, so that it becomes the revelation of a transcendent Other, whose own existence is nevertheless only postulated as an act of faith.⁶⁷

Faced, then, with so many objections how should the

teleological argument be reshaped? Hegel's answer is that the particular ends or purposes which nature seems to disclose are not really ends at all; the innumerable organisms which come into being and pass away again are in themselves insignificant. Their 'end' is not their survival as individual existants but only that of *life itself* in all its multiform diversity.

When we say, God has made things thus, we are uttering a pious observation, we are rising to God (*es ist eine Erhebung zu Gott*); but when we think of God we have the idea (*Vorstellung*) of an absolute, infinite end, and these petty ends present a sharp contrast to what we recognize as his actual nature.⁶⁸

Hence the real end of all things is the Whole in which and for which they subsist, and to which they themselves are but the means. They are like the planets which revolve round the sun, simply members of a single system. And if we want the 'reason' for this Whole we must seek it within itself and not outside it. There is no supreme Intelligence over and above the universe directing it — as still less its components — to some goal or goals already assigned. Instead one should understand the universe to be its own end, to the attaining of which it evolves its own means. 'It is not an aggregate of many accidents existing in a relation of indifference but a system endowed with life' (*ein System der Lebendigkeit*).⁶⁹ And this unique Whole, this Absolute apart from which there is and can be nothing, is God. But the Absolute is also Spirit, and in helping us to comprehend what this means the third of the classical proofs, the ontological, is of direct service. In fact the other arguments, as Kant rightly points out, derive their force from it.

The Ontological Argument, to give it its traditional name, follows a different principle from either of the previous ones; it does not appeal from contingency to necessity or from proximate to ultimate teleology: causal or quasi-causal considerations do not enter into it. The procedure here is even more abstract — namely, from a bare concept to the reality which it purports to define. It seeks, that is, to place God's existence beyond all doubt by showing that the very idea of God itself requires it. Analyse, it says, the notion that God is, in St Anselm's phrase, 'that than which nothing greater can be

conceived' (*id quo nihil maius cogitari non possit*), and you will see that his existence cannot be denied without contradiction.⁷⁰ Kant, as is well known, rejected the argument, essentially on the grounds that existence is not a predicate. 'To think of a Being of the highest reality, a Being in whom no reality is wanting, in no way settles the question, whether that Being does or does not exist.'⁷¹ In short one cannot, even with regard to the unique being of God, pass straight from concept to reality by insisting that the one *logically* implies the other.

Once again, however, Hegel is in disagreement with Kant. He admits that the argument did not readily present itself to the mind of antiquity. It does not occur in ancient Greek philosophy, nor in Christianity until the time of St Anselm in the eleventh century, although afterwards it was taken up by such thinkers as Descartes, Leibniz and Christian Wolff, 'yet always with the other proofs, though it alone is the true one.'⁷² The importance Hegel himself nonetheless attaches to the argument is indicative of the character of Hegelianism itself. To appreciate his interpretation of it, therefore, is to go far towards understanding his metaphysical outlook as a whole.

Yet Hegel's own position is a good way from that of Anselm or Descartes, as well as Kant. In the first place he criticises the traditional view (especially as set out by Leibniz) for misconceiving the meaning of perfection as ascribed to God. The divine attributes, that is, are conceived only in their *affirmative* aspect, and limitlessly; negation is accorded no place. In the event all we are left with is a purely abstract unity, although if these same attributes — omnipotence, omniscience, wisdom, righteousness, etc. — are conceived *concretely* they will easily be seen to involve mutual contradiction. 'Goodness is not righteousness, and absolute power contradicts wisdom, since the latter presupposes final ends, whereas power means the limitlessness of negation and production.' Secondly, the exponents of natural theology, and even Kant himself, assume a hiatus between concept and existence. In the case of finite beings it obviously is true that existence does not necessarily conform to the idea we have of it; yet even here there is no absolute discontinuity. A concept that is no more than a concept, one that is totally subjective and divorced from existence, is a mere nullity; though on the other hand existence which has no essence or definition is literally inconceivable. With the concept

of God, however — as Kant failed to perceive — this disparity no longer obtains, for God is one with that Whole or sum of things which could not be conceived unless it were real, so that its definition must imply its existence. 'Concept and existence form an identity; in other words, God as concept cannot be conceived of without being. . . . The concept is actual being, being for itself also. It abolishes subjectivity, and objectifies itself.'⁷³

Thus God, the Absolute, as the ultimate reality cannot be other than *thought*. He is the thought of thought, in which subject and object are one. Hegel may express this, as we saw in the previous chapter, in the language of Christian theology, but he holds that it is of the nature of religious utterance, even when given the relative precision of theological dogma, to fall short of that fully adequate articulation which can be attained by philosophy alone. God as Idea is the universal and necessary Essence of all being, and hence is that supreme reality apart from whom there is and can be nothing. It is an error therefore to suppose, as even Christian thinkers very commonly have done, that God is outside his creation, existing in the final resort only in and for himself in celestial isolation. Without creation the divine nature would be unknown and unknowable even to God himself. Nature, that is, both expresses God and is God; being the self-objectification of God in space and time. Thus concrete existence belongs to the very concept of the Absolute, which in order to be itself has to become something 'other' than itself, even though in the process there is a certain loss through self-alienation. But again, the self-alienation is not final, for God exists in, and by means of, the spirit of man between whom and nature there is no essential discontinuity. For spirit is anticipated in matter itself, which has the potentiality of life and therefore of subjective self-consciousness. Nature is the negation of spirit only at a particular level or moment; rather it is the complement and condition of its higher self-realisation. With full awareness of what nature truly is, spirit can both take account of the world in which man dwells and look beyond it to the universal and infinite to which all finitude points. In short, God is all that the human spirit is capable of becoming in the long course of its historic development. For it is in the human mind that finite and infinite unite and Spirit reaches the goal of ultimate self-knowledge.

6 Some Problems of Interpretation

(i) THEISM OR PANTHEISM?

It is no exaggeration, I think, to say that in Hegel's philosophy the problem of God poses the central issue. To know God, we are told, as he is in himself, is the aim and end of all wisdom. Indeed the entire Hegelian logic could very fairly be described as a prolonged dialectical argument reaching out to the first principle of all things, namely Universal Spirit or the Absolute.¹ Hegel himself, as we have just seen, takes the classical 'proofs' of divine existence sufficiently seriously to wish to re-state them — the ontological especially — in terms of his own speculative thinking. He believed that with every advance of reason — more, that at every moment in the life of the mind — the being of God is implied. If experience leads us to discern at least a partial unity in things seemingly disparate it is because the human reason is so constituted as to demand a unity that is fundamental and all-comprehending. In other words, it is a requirement of the mind that reality should ultimately be one, that no essential element of discontinuity is rationally tolerable, and that finality in any given area indicates a teleology intrinsic to the universe as a whole. The very dynamism of reason testifies an appetite for that total truth which is identical with God himself. Hegel, in short, is very far indeed from denying God or excusing agnosticism. Thought itself, he declares, is divine service, and we have no reason to doubt his conviction that his own explanation of Christianity would set it once for all upon an intellectual basis which neither misrepresentation nor criticism would ever again be able to shake.

The heart of Hegel's religious philosophy is then his affirmation that God and the world are a unity. Deity does not pertain to an order of things 'beyond' the universe, and he reproved both orthodoxy and rationalism for having represented transcendence in just this quasi-spatial way. To separate God from the universe would mean the disruption of truth itself, for without it God would be inconceivable as God: *Ohne Welt ist Gott nicht Gott*. But in this case the question is bound to be asked how far the Hegelian divinity is reconcilable with Christian theism, and in particular to what extent the idea of revelation, upon which the Church's faith and doctrine claim to be founded, can hope to retain its distinctive meaning and signification. Does God exist in any sense whatever independently of what Christian theology calls creation? And is the latter to be thought of as necessary to the Creator himself as is he to it? Has the world any reality apart from God, or God himself any subsistence apart from the world? Yet Hegel states repeatedly that God is God only in so far as he knows himself, and that this self-knowledge on his part is his self-consciousness *in man*; that it is in truth the knowledge man himself has of God.²

Thus the objection has inevitably to be faced that Hegel's 'theism' is really nothing else than pantheism in a Christian guise, even though he himself repudiated the word and dissociated his own philosophy from what it is usually assumed to connote. Indeed the kind of pantheism which would identify the being of God with the finite objects that make up the empirical world is not, he insists, to be found in any religion or in any philosophy worthy of the name.³ Such a notion he dismisses as flatly absurd. But neither will he have it that his own doctrine is a resuscitation of Parmenides' or Spinoza's — which latter he characterises as 'acosmism' — or, he would add, Schelling's either, whose undifferentiated Absolute, apprehensible only by an act of intuition, was, he held, a concept altogether different from that developed in his own 'Philosophy of Spirit'.⁴ For the latter, he claimed, as much transcended all earlier philosophies — important elements of truth though these undoubtedly comprised — as did Christianity, the absolute religion, transcend all other faiths.⁵

Nevertheless the charge of pantheism was levelled at Hegel by some of his critics from the very first.⁶ In dealing with it

however we must be fair to Hegel himself and give full consideration to what he has to say in explanation of his view. As we have noted, he castigates the 'philosophy of the understanding' — the old-style metaphysics — for positing a separation between God and the universe. Finitude, the world of 'appearance', was set over against infinity, the ultimately real. Their unity, in a certain sense, was not denied, but according to Hegel was misconceived as a mere juxtaposition of two essentially diverse orders of being. Yet even the traditional metaphysicians spoke of God as *omnipresent*, although how they maintained this whilst at the same time stressing that God and his creation are quite separate is not easy to comprehend. What, in fact, did they mean by omnipresence? Or again, if the transcendent God is said to act *in* the world how exactly is such action to be explained? Questions like these, Hegel urges, can be answered only if the whole God—world relation is viewed from a higher spiritual vantage-point. In itself what we call the universe is sheer multiplicity, unlimited diversity, even open contradiction. The coherence it presents is imparted to it by our own finite minds. Unity therefore is a progressive achievement of the spirit, the ultimate goal of which is attained only in the mind of God as infinite subject. Or to put it otherwise, the universe is the 'thought' of God as the eternal Idea, the 'Word' by which he is externally expressed and manifested. It thus must be conceived as existing *in* God, whether as material being, the natural order, or as the finite intelligence of individual subjects. The unity which holds all things together is that of an infinitely complex organism defying any attempt to present it under the ordinary categories of the understanding.

God and the world, then, are one; but God is not *simply* the world, and their oneness, Hegel insists, is not a pantheistic identity. He admires Spinoza and defends him, while at the same time distinguishing his own doctrine from what is usually understood by the formula *Deus sive Natura*; for what, he judges, Spinoza is saying is that nature is God rather than God nature, so virtually denying the real existence of the world. In Hegel's philosophy the universe truly exists, but not in a final or absolute sense, since it is God alone who is ultimately real. Yet although by the terms of the dialectic the world is eventually to be negated the negation is not pure negation, for just as all affirmation contains its own denial so all negation points to a

new affirmation. The negated term, that is, is not completely cancelled but becomes a stage or moment in a higher unity. With suppression there goes also preservation (*Aufhebung*). But for the same reason the universe cannot be said to have a fully substantive existence, an existence in and of itself without reference to anything other than itself. Here indeed Hegel claims that philosophy under-writes the teachings of religion, which has similarly tended to regard the world as less than truly real. But at the same time he cannot endorse the Spinozistic doctrine that the universe is no more than an 'accident' of the divine substance; for in essence God is subject not substance, and subjectivity, mind, spirit must always be conceived as primary.⁷ The superiority of the Hebraic-Christian religious tradition to those of the East is measured by the extent to which it has grasped this truth.

However, when all has been said in Hegel's favour as a theist the pantheistic ethos which pervades his thought is not readily dispelled. The kind of phraseology which he persistently uses would seem to bear out the opinion of many commentators that the Hegelian philosophy has in fact no place for divine transcendence, substituting for it a doctrine of total immanence, according to which the Absolute has reality only in the finite mind itself, so that God's self-realisation is but another way of describing the entire process of human experience in history.⁸ This wide divergence of view among Hegel's interpreters on a matter so fundamental is disconcerting to the student who comes fresh to these difficult texts. But the truth is that his meaning is apt again and again to be obscured by the sheer density of the language which is intended to convey it. What he says may be taken in one sense or in another: citations could be listed which appear to support either interpretation. Moreover, although Hegel writes as a philosopher he has repeated recourse to the utterance of theology, and the two can very well clash. It is evidently this strong theological interest permeating his work that helps to confuse his meaning and so to render him rather worse than suspect in the eyes of those who prefer logic without mysticism. For the trouble with Hegel is that he is both a logician and a mystic.

Certainly it has always to be borne in mind that the Christian doctrinal scheme provides Hegel with the *Vorstellung* or symbolic 'myth' which his logic sets out to rationalise in ostensibly

conceptual form; though the actual process of such rationalisation, it must be said, involves the kind of restatement which, as many would contend, changes its whole character. All too easily the purely factitious elements composing the myth disappear when overlaid by a structure whose principle is a timeless and abstract necessity. The passage of universal Spirit through the stages of its self-alienation in nature, only to return once more upon itself with the fulfilment of its own self-conscious and creative activity *in man*, constitutes the eternally operative process, which Hegel delineates in the triadic plan of Logic, Philosophy of Nature, Philosophy of Spirit of which his system is composed. But in the course of it the contingent, 'visual' aspect of Christian theology gradually vanishes. Not unnaturally those who see in Christianity the action of a divine-human drama turning upon events and circumstances that are both specific and unrepeated, find the substitute unacceptable. In Hegel's mind, however, truth in a form which is ultimately comprehensible by reason cannot but be timeless and necessary. Thus to the question of his alleged pantheism he would doubtless have answered that any idea of God which divests him of complete implication in his own universe would render him less than God — merely another existant over and against the created order (itself gratuitous) and therefore lacking that definition or determination of his own being which the universe eternally provides. Creation, in sum, is God's manifestation of himself to himself within the mirror of human consciousness, for man, according to the biblical teaching, is his veritable image.

(ii) NECESSARY TRUTH AND CONTINGENT EVENTS

Although Hegel deals at length with what he calls the soul's elevation to God he nevertheless is well aware that some religions claim to be based on divine revelation, and that it is by virtue of this that they impose their authority on the individual. For the alleged supernatural disclosure is not looked upon as something merely additional to what man can learn of God through his own intuition or intellective power, but, on the contrary, as central and normative, lying at the heart of the religion which believes itself to possess it. The concept of such a

revelation depends, furthermore, on faith in a deity who in the clearest sense is *personal*, manifesting intelligent purpose by his free control of, or at least decisive intervention in, the course of human history. And of all religions of revelation Hegel certainly recognises that Christianity is the most deeply committed to such a view. The difficulty therefore of reconciling it with the doctrine that the self-projection of the Absolute is a 'necessary' movement can from this standpoint be resolved only by treating the religious idea as a *Vorstellung*, an imaginative representation assuming the form of human drama or dialogue. What speculative thought does is to interpret this in terms of the *Begriff*, the conceptual idea. Yet one is again and again struck by the way in which Hegel constantly falls back on the familiar and generally unphilosophical language of religious belief. It is not surprising therefore that the impression conveyed is apt to be confused.

Hegel's own discussion of revelation is firmly linked to the Bible, of the authority of which he is profoundly conscious, as the objective historical source of Christian doctrine.⁹ This 'positive' disclosure must however be set against the background of that general or natural revelation whereby the existence of God is recognised through the works of his hands. Yet it would be short-sighted to limit such reflection simply to physical nature, as a much deeper and richer apprehension of God may be gained from spiritual beings, for man himself, in his intelligence and freedom, directly witnesses to God. When therefore we speak of a special revelation what we have in mind – and the Hebrew-Christian scriptures provide the classic example – is the action of divine providence which is discernible in particular events. Here God is seen as more than the sustaining power within or behind the natural order – rather as a purposeful intelligence choosing the moment or *kairos* of his self-disclosure and the persons and circumstances through and under which it will be communicated.

The recipient of a divine revelation is in the first instance the prophet, whose mission it is to impart it to the people, although humanly speaking he may accept his obligation only with reluctance, knowing full well that in proclaiming his message he will meet with indifference or hostility. But always it is the message which counts, not the person of him who conveys it. In the case of the founder of Christianity, on the other hand, an altogether different status is alleged. Here message and messen-

ger are inseparable. The appearance of the Christian God, says Hegel, contrasting the incarnation with the avatars of other religious traditions, involves its being *unique* in its kind. 'It can occur only once, for God is realized as subject, and as manifested subjectivity is exclusively one Individual.'¹⁰ Thus in the biblical perspective revelation is an historic process culminating in the unique event of the coming of Christ. It is this uniqueness which invests the death of Christ with a vastly greater significance than, say, that of Socrates, to which Graeco-Roman antiquity looked back with profound reverence. Socrates was a splendid example both to his contemporaries and to posterity, but the figure of the sage himself is not that of a mediator between God and man. For this reason Hegel could feel little sympathy with the 'liberal' theologians of his age who, as he complained, gave to the person and work of the Redeemer and Reconciler 'a merely prosaic psychological signification', so that although the edifying words were preserved all that was essential in the traditional doctrine had been expunged.¹¹ The fact that the vehicle of revelation is one with its content was simply ignored.

The designation *positive* is given appropriately to those religions which in claiming to be based on a special divine disclosure are made dependent on the contingencies of history. The facts to which they appeal, that is, have no logical necessity and their spiritual meaning is read into them *ab extra*. The positive religions, moreover, as proof of their authenticity, usually invoke miracles, although it is notable that Christ himself deprecated them as a criterion of truth; and rightly so, since 'true faith has no accidental content'.¹² But the actual repository of revelation is a body of writings held to be divinely inspired and therefore sacred, and although in the Bible we find a wide variety of literary forms it has to be understood that the mode of expression is adapted to the outlook of a relatively simple people. As a statement of truth it is unsystematic and Christianity is represented only as it appeared at the beginning of its history. ('It is Spirit which grasps the meaning and unfolds the content.') Not surprisingly the biblical language is for the most part metaphorical or symbolic and resorts to parables and myths that reflect a mentality far removed from that of modern man.¹³ Yet for all their archaism the Christian scriptures contain a doctrine which is significant for all ages and not only

that in which they were composed. But if this be so is not positive religion self-sufficient and in need of no further support or explanation in terms of common reason? At most times indeed there have been those who would insist, with Tertullian, that 'after Christ Jesus and the gospel' subtle philosophical inquiries have no relevance.¹⁴

Hegel's account of what revelation means to the religious believer is thus on the whole a faithful one; he uses the familiar phraseology and interprets it along traditional lines. But of course in his view, while he admits that religious language is proper for purely religious purposes, it nonetheless demands reinterpretation at the level of speculative thought. The Bible imparts its teaching imaginatively, but if we are to move beyond the stage of the imagination — and rationality itself requires this — we have to reflect upon it and translate it into the appropriate conceptual language. This process in its more developed form is what constitutes theology. 'scientific religion'.¹⁵ Yet here again difficulties arise, for theology as commonly understood pertains to the *Verstand*, although actually it is rooted in the *Vorstellung*. Thus God is conceived, on the one hand, as wholly transcending the world, while, on the other, his self-revelation appears as somehow an incursion or irruption *into* history even though man's own ultimate destiny lies beyond the bounds of time and place — a truth which it is the very purpose of revelation to make known to all men. The outcome is the traditional pattern of Christian dogma as taught (with their respective variations) by both Catholicism and Protestantism. But the question is whether this pattern is any longer acceptable or even intelligible in its old form. Hegel certainly thinks that the rationalist critics of the previous century had dealt severely with it, while at the same time the defence of it put up by the orthodox had been unimpressive. Indeed he recognises, in the main, the justice of such criticism and has no wish to discount it. Where he differs from the 'reductionist' theology he is, as we have seen, frankly contemptuous.

How in the end revelation is to be cognised depends, then, very largely on one's conception of God himself. Unless the divine action is held to be 'sovereign' and 'free' revelation must be thought of as the *necessary* expression of the divine being. Biblical religion, on the contrary, maintains God's freedom and

sovereignty, teaching that all his acts of self-disclosure are governed by a purposiveness over which he has complete control. Hence creation and redemption alike are contingent upon his decision, so that the extent of his revelation is determined not by the intrinsic necessities of his nature but by his deliberative wisdom.¹⁶ Traditional theism has never derogated from this position. God *chose* to redeem, *chose* to impart a knowledge of himself and his ways, in accordance with a freedom which the Bible regards as absolute. Were it otherwise (it is argued) he could not be worshipped as either self-sufficient or sovereign, and the distinction between the divine and the human would have been erased.

As a philosopher, however, Hegel fears that in representing God as exercising a liberty of this sort, theology is admitting to the Absolute at least an element of the arbitrary and contingent, such as is bound to affect the whole concept of revelation in both form and content. It is true that he himself is wont to speak of the 'freedom' of God, but in, I think, a rather Spinozistic fashion as meaning that if God is to be identified with being in its totality then he obviously cannot be subject to external restraint of any kind. What he does is determined by his own nature: in a word, God *must be* God. He is never to be thought of as confronted by a choice of alternatives or as changing his mind about what action he is to pursue. His being, his creativity and his purposes are for him *one*. His redemption of man therefore could not have been an open option, involving a calculated decision. It doubtless is not easy, given the limitations of the human understanding, to conceive of a freedom in which contingency has no part, yet the biblical idea of God acting 'freely' in a way analogous to human freedom is, philosophically speaking, inapposite and inadequate.

Even on the doctrine that God is 'free' to do as he will and that revelation represents his specific purposiveness within human history the question whether he *has* so acted, *has* vouchsafed a deliberate disclosure of himself to man, still stands. Plainly a divine revelation, were it actually to have been given, would be of supreme importance to the human race. But how is such an assurance to be arrived at? For when it is asserted that revelation takes the form of contingent events its ground at once becomes dubious. With the passing of the centuries an historical occurrence recedes ever further into the

past, and in any case the precise shape of it or the exact circumstances attending it may always have been undefined. Thus can we be sure that the biblical narratives are authentic? And if not how can we know that the alleged happenings were in fact the vehicle of divine truth? Since the rise of historical criticism this problem has only become more acute. Investigation into the origin and transmission of the biblical witness presents a highly complex issue, incapable perhaps of any final solution, especially as the historiographical methods of antiquity are a good deal lacking in the sophistication to which the modern world has grown accustomed. Particularly disconcerting is the supposedly miraculous element: can we any longer consider miracles as the necessary credentials of revealed truth? Hegel discusses the question more than once, but is clearly unconvinced that the miraculous retains any apologetic value for his own age. All of which only goes to show that where religion appeals to the merely contingent and relative one can do no more than assess the probabilities.

Miracles however are not the sole defence weapon in the armoury of apologetic theology. It is contended, for instance, that Christianity satisfies, as nothing else can, man's deepest spiritual needs and is an unfailing consolation in all life's trials and tribulations: or again, that the growth and expansion of the Christian religion in the ancient world is itself testimony to the divine provision which continuously sustained it. Yet these too are arguments which Hegel finds little convincing as proof of revelation. Even that drawn from the superior morality of the gospel — an argument that goes back at least to the second century of the Christian era — is really no more cogent. In fact any appeal to *particular* conditions or circumstances to demonstrate a special divine publication of truth can never be accepted without reserve.

The foregoing considerations relate moreover only to the alleged occasions or means of revelation. Even were they to be accepted the question of its content would still have to be answered. For *what* truth or truths is it supposed to have imparted, and how are they to be assessed in case of doubt? A revelation which is obscure or ambiguous can scarcely be of much help to mankind, being more likely to cause dispute and division. Christians doubtless are in general agreement that their doctrines are contained in the Bible, which for them is a primary

authority. But simply to say that one should keep to the biblical phraseology is less useful than it sounds, since hermeneutical difficulties abound. Its language is often far from clear – sometimes, it would seem, wilfully so: ‘that hearing, they might not understand’ – while Christians notoriously have disagreed about cardinal texts, to the extent even of basing opposing doctrines on identical words. As the proverb says, the Devil himself can quote scripture, but that does not make him a trustworthy theologian.¹⁷ Even the mere passage of time suffices to place the biblical witness in a quite new light, in that the intellectual presuppositions of one age cease to be those of another, and the way we look at the Bible – our intellectual and moral perspectives – will inevitably result in our interpreting it along fresh lines. In short, ‘it is no longer the Bible which we have here, but the words as these have been conceived of within the mind or spirit’.¹⁸

Nor is the hermeneutic problem the only obstacle: the scriptures contain a great deal which has very little relation to faith, or at least is not directly its object. Some matters are plainly vital to Christian belief, as spiritual truth of the highest order; others, though of value, do not make the same demand on the believer’s conscience. Christ’s resurrection from the dead, for example, is central to the creed, but its attendant circumstances, of which the gospels offer discrepant accounts, are clearly open to question. Even church dogma, important as it is, is not simply to be equated with Jesus’ own teaching, and indeed the differences between them are not to be concealed. Yet apart from the church’s theological reflection Hegel asks whether it would be possible, even with the Bible in our hands, to decide what is essential and what accessory, what to be taken on faith and what left aside among the *dubitanda*. Actually to prove, point by point, that this or that doctrine has the certain warrant of scripture has never been as easy as the theologians like to pretend, and in some matters may be impossible; nor is it always relevant to make the attempt.

There is however the role of *tradition* to be taken into account, and Hegel does not choose to minimise it. The Christian religion originated, he concedes’ in an impulse which was free and spontaneous and strongly marked by the historic personality of its founder, but with the emergent institution a certain shaping of its beliefs becomes apparent, even within the

period of the New Testament. The subsequent expansion of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world also meant that the influence of Greek philosophical thought was bound sooner or later to make itself felt, while the controversies which raged over the precise signification of the main articles of faith supplied further reason for the work of intellectual formulation. The factors contributing to the development of the Christian doctrinal scheme are many and complex, although the 'Spiritual Community' of the church has always shown a remarkable capacity for moulding diverse elements into a coherent whole.¹⁹ This body of increasingly articulated doctrine is what found summary expression in the *creeds*, which in consequence came to be regarded as authoritative.²⁰

Yet tradition is no more free than scripture from difficulties of interpretation or even the determining of its content. What at one time may seem to have been of prime importance may at another appear very much less so, and the exact sense in which dogmatic formularies are to be received depends on the point of view of the age itself. Thus the historian is faced with much the same sort of problem as the biblical exegete; he cannot be quite sure, on the evidence before him, that in the final resort tradition is an authority any more reliable than the sacred writings themselves. This however is a condition of things by which Hegel is not unduly perturbed, for what counts, he thinks, is the church's *de facto* power to decide, and its resourcefulness in deciding which doctrines really are necessary for the maintenance of the spiritual life.²¹ The mistake is in supposing that the content of the church's belief can be determined purely by means of historical inquiry, or that the historical theologian can now replace the systematic. Historical theology, like biblical criticism, certainly has its uses, but they are limited and subordinate. 'History occupies itself with truths that *were* truths'; but with the real content of dogma (i.e. the knowledge of God) the historian of theology has no direct concern.²² For the purpose of religion man needs the assurance of revelation itself, not merely the tentative conclusions of erudite scholarship. 'It is with the value of his own spirit that man has to do, and he is not at liberty humbly to remain outside and to wander about at a distance.'²³

The rationalising theologians of an older generation, Hegel points out, had come to see this. The whole tendency of the

Enlightenment was to restrict the area of dogma and to minimise its importance — not suprisingly, since the greater our knowledge of finite things, the realm of science, the more circumscribed our knowledge of God. Some of course would maintain that we can know nothing of him, and a large section of public opinion would, in a secularising age, be little troubled at being told so. What is worse, even the theologians have acquiesced. Christ's atonement, for example — a belief once deemed central to the faith — has been degraded to the level of a bare exemplarism, while even the 'weighty doctrine' of the Trinity or that of the resurrection of the body is treated as of no moment. Christ's divinity itself, a doctrine peculiar to Christianity and of unique significance for it, is set aside or treated only in a generalising way. In short, if many contemporary theologians were to 'lay their hands on their hearts and to say whether they consider faith in the Trinity to be indispensably necessary to salvation, there can be no doubt what the answer would be'.²⁴ The object of religious faith is thus rendered as vague as possible.

That Hegel should deplore this whole tendency may at first seem odd, in view of his own clearly 'modernising' attitudes. Yet we must take him to be entirely sincere in doing so, for reasons which, in the wider context of his philosophy, are not difficult to assess. Well may he ask himself what, for rational theology, divine revelation can possibly signify. There could be no point in asserting that God has declared himself when what he is supposed to have said amounts to so little. Or how can we respect the commandment 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect', if actually we know nothing of the Perfect One himself? Yet if God is incomprehensible what else would be worth while comprehending? In so far as even reputedly orthodox theologians concede to the 'reductionist' standpoint they only serve to undermine their own position.

Unfortunately orthodoxy has not helped, Hegel observes, to a deeper understanding of the nature of the Christian dogmas by persistently referring to them as *mysteries*. A mystery as such defies comprehension and the effort to unravel it may be futile. What useful purpose can doctrines serve which are essentially mysterious? Are the statements, for example, that God is both one and three and that Christ is both God and man merely intellectual puzzles? Talk of revelation as 'mystery' has

done much in modern times, Hegel thinks, to discredit it in the eyes of the educated.^{2 5}

The weakness, then, of any concept of revelation which ties it to contingent events in a past more or less remote is that it makes the content of revelation ambiguous and doubtful. The authenticity of the happenings themselves needs to be established, and this can now be attempted only by recourse to the ordinary methods of historiography, so that the supposed assurance of faith comes to be associated with a type of apologetic which may be plausible enough for some minds but which to the more sceptical or sophisticated is unable to carry any firm conviction. For between the events, as historical research can establish them, and the transcendental meaning which theology attributes to them there remains a gap with no secure bridge to span it. Schleiermacher once laid down that faith should come to us with the irresistible impact of truth and not from some strained and arbitrary decision. It is a view which Hegel himself shares. Belief should have its roots deep in the life of spirit and not be poised insecurely on critical opinion. Revelation ought in fact to give us absolute certitude: when believing is made to depend on a calculation of probabilities the whole structure becomes fragile, whereas faith is not faith unless it is confident. Our knowledge of the past can never arrive at complete certainty, and if religious conviction is to be justified it must discover firmer ground on which to stand. Revelation has to be seen therefore as self-authenticating at the bar of reason, and it is philosophy alone which can supply the requisite means to do this. Indeed Hegel looks on philosophy as a form of theology, or more precisely as a *speculative* theology, his own responsibility as a speculative thinker being to demonstrate that this is so — to show how, at the highest reaches of thought, theology passes into philosophy. The question is whether in the process, the sheer singularity of the revealing *event* is not suppressed.

(iii) THE 'SPECULATIVE' TREATMENT OF DOCTRINE

In other words, can it be maintained that the history of revelation when so interpreted has any longer the providential distinctiveness of supernatural causation? If the answer is Yes

then must not Hegel's interpretation of Christian doctrine itself reflect the fact? The question is, as we have seen, most insistent in regard to the fundamental issue of the divine transcendence and personality. But even apart from this Hegel's treatment of the dogma of the Trinity at once lifts the reader out of the sphere of traditional theological exposition. Hegel himself is well versed in the traditional theology, and in so far as the doctrine remains a *Vorstellung* he is content to confine himself to it. But when he goes on to re-state it in speculative terms there is no concealing the transformation which it is made to undergo; for what we now have is decidedly an 'economic' not an 'essential' trinitarianism — not so much, that is, an account of the inner being of the Godhead as the manner in which the divine is apprehended by man. Yet can the theologian really be satisfied with a modernised version of third-century modalism? At the hands of Hegel this doctrine takes on a pantheistic look, in a way already anticipated by Lessing.

A further notable instance of what happens when a doctrine is 'speculatively' treated may be seen with regard to original sin. Here the fall of Adam is frankly 'demythologised' by no longer being represented as an historical (or quasi-historical) event. It ceases to be the 'primal fault' the guilt or moral taint of which is simply transmitted or imputed to Adam's posterity; nor, as in Catholic theology, is it the loss of certain original *dona supernaturalia*, or superadded grace. Rather is it 'the eternal Mythos of man', the *de facto* transition by which man becomes man in the sense of assuming full human responsibility. Apart from the fall, mankind would have remained at the level of mere animal 'innocence' and the true life of spirit would have been precluded.²⁶ Indeed we are expressly told that it is not the case that reflection stands in an 'eternal relation' to evil, but that, on the contrary, it is itself evil, such being 'the condition of contrast to which man, because he is spirit, must advance'. Knowledge therefore necessarily involves sin — and without knowledge man would not be man.

With Christ however comes reconciliation, *Versöhnung*, by which is meant the negation of division, the overcoming of alienation. On the face of it one would have supposed that the traditional Christian insistence on the utter uniqueness of Christ and 'once-for-allness' of the cross would have presented Hegel with the problem of historical contingency in its most obstinate

form. But here again he so interprets the doctrine as to introduce a subtle but unmistakable change. Christ's death had, in itself, to occur in the course of nature, since death is the lot of finite humanity. Moreover, he died the 'aggravated death of the evil-doer', thus through personal degradation giving complete proof of his humanity. By accepting such appalling humiliation Christ showed that spirit, being free, is still superior to nature. Yet as the God-Man he was not bound by the limitations of time and space, and death was followed by resurrection and glorification. In a sentence, death is taken up into the very being of God and negated there. But all this pertains to *faith*. The abolition and absorption of the natural, Hegel significantly comments, is to be conceived of rationally as meaning that the movement of Spirit consists in comprehending itself in itself, in dying to the natural, in order to re-emerge fully and truly itself.²⁷ Christ's death — though natural — being the death of God, it is sufficient for our atonement, in that it exhibits 'the absolute history of the Divine Idea, what has implicitly taken place and taken place eternally'. The cross is simply, it seems, the historic symbol of a process that really is timeless.

This last point, in fact, brings us to the heart of the difficulty which for many minds Hegel's religious philosophy never fails to raise. His own 'speculative philosophy', he would appear to be arguing, presents the Christian revelation in its inward and 'spiritual' meaning — its ultimate truth; yet how exactly is this related to the outward and concrete form? Is there anything about the actual events themselves, and especially of course those constituting the work of Christ, which is specific, unique, unrepeatable? Or is the biblical narrative only a vivid illustration of what the speculative reason can recognise to be true quite apart from any particular support it may gain from the contingencies of history? The problem from Hegel's point of view is, as we have noted, that of establishing the authenticity of such events in the detail required to sustain the religious claim. Yet, even though in the long run the hard facts should prove elusive, must not the significance which theology attaches to them be seen to be essentially independent of them? In reply it can scarcely be said that Hegel's position is clear. In the main he does not doubt the veracity of the gospel history; at least he does not dispute the singularity of Christ, or at any rate does not qualify his own point that the unity of divine and human is

properly or even necessarily expressed in the life of a particular individual.²⁸ Nevertheless it is not easy to rid oneself of the impression that Hegel is adopting the standpoint of the traditional orthodoxy largely as a practical concession to ordinary believers — after all, the vast majority — who cannot advance to a more metaphysical plane of thought. What matters, as he would judge, is not a critical assessment of the historical identity of Jesus or an examination of the means and conditions by and under which the Church's doctrines came to be defined, or again the extraneous influences which aided their formulation. 'Let all such circumstances', he avers, 'have been what they might. The only concerning question is: What is the Idea or the truth in and for itself?'.²⁹ In which case it would seem that where the facticity of events fails to yield to the demands of universal reason it becomes for philosophy only an otiose element.

Thus the question the student of Hegel's religious philosophy is bound to ask himself is whether he is not being invited to admit a double standard of truth whereby what is acceptable enough in theology can and needs to be explained away in philosophy. The notion of such a double standard was of course by no means a novelty, having been taught — or so their critics objected — by the Averroist Siger of Brabant and his followers in the thirteenth century.³⁰ Yet we may be sure that Hegel himself would have denied maintaining anything of the sort: truth for him, as for any rational man, was and could only be one. Besides, the medieval thinkers who upheld the double-truth theory were concerned to assert the primacy of faith, for even though propositions at variance with the church's teaching might be verifiable at the bar of reason the authority of revelation was always to be considered paramount. Clearly, however, no such position could be defended after the age of Enlightenment: what reason sees or can prove to be true may not be contradicted. On the other hand, what Hegel repeatedly says (or consistently implies) when he distinguishes the *Begriff* from the *Vorstellung*, the idea 'in and for itself' from the mere mental picture (or ideas which still retain a pictorial element within them) — between what in fact can be readily grasped by all men and what is comprehensible only to the understanding few — certainly leaves the reader with the impression that truth is capable of being presented in ways so diverse that one

statement of it can be virtually negated by another. That Hegel himself regarded the conceptual rendering as superior to the merely representational is of the very essence of his doctrine.

The problem here, it now emerges — albeit in Hegelian terms — is the age-old one of faith and reason. Certain familiar solutions are to be rejected straight away, as they merely cut the knot instead of untying it. One of these is the view — the outcome either of complacency or of fear — that religion and philosophy are totally different concerns and have nothing to do with one another. It is not simply that the philosopher will eschew religious belief, or the believer avoid philosophy, as incompatible with his own ends; sometimes the division occurs within one and the same mind, which thus contrives to think on two separate levels. But to a man like Hegel, for whom the unity of reason and reality allows of no qualification, anything of this kind is intolerable. He states again and again that philosophy and religion have the same ultimate object but that their differing modes of approaching it must be seen *not* to involve mutual antagonism. In any case, it is impossible for a man to serve two masters. Even the Thomist idea of the complementarity of the 'natural' and the 'supernatural' Hegel disallows as an unwarranted mystification. Reason knows nothing above itself or outside of itself, so that religious beliefs, translated into theological doctrines, must fall within the indivisible domain of the rational. The mistake of the Enlightenment was to suppose that in using reason to 'explain' the Christian dogmas it was simply disposing of them. Unfortunately the orthodox reaction to rationalism of this sort was apt to take the form of pietism — *Schwärmerei*, as Kant dubbed it — in which the intellectual element in faith largely vanishes in a haze of 'feeling'.

The fact, though, remains, no matter how assiduously Hegel tries to conceal it, that the human spirit needs for its ultimate self-fulfilment something more than what religion — even the 'Absolute Religion' — can of itself ever supply. Religion conveys truth — *the* truth — unquestionably; but it is truth 'in itself', *an sich*, not 'for itself', *für sich*. In other words, it is not yet properly aware of itself, inasmuch as the forms under which it appears are not fully conceptualised. For the truth of religion — divinely 'revealed' though it is — exists only in a guise

adapted to the conditions of the popular understanding; it speaks to the heart and the imagination — even if, to some extent, the reason also. But the question must eventually be put as to what real need there is for mere concessions to human weakness when the mature and reflective intellect can nevertheless attain to truth at its most elevated level. The language of the Bible is vividly concrete; it portrays the divine in terms of the living God dealing with mankind in ways freely — even arbitrarily — chosen. Translate this, however, into the abstract categories of speculative philosophy and surely one enters an entirely new world of thought. Metaphysics may very well assert that God and the Absolute are one, but how can it be demonstrated — often against all appearance — that they are? Might it not be objected that the philosophical view is no more than a meagre, aetiolated notion, whereas the religious image yields truth in a shape both fuller and more colourful? Yet this would only reverse Hegel's position, since philosophy would thus become merely the stepping-stone to religion, with the result that its whole status and function as the ultimate and completely adequate expression of spirit would have been forfeited. Let us grant that the religious believer is in actual possession of the truth, while the philosopher, for all his greater intellectual sophistication, will be no more richly furnished, at least as to its substance; but how is it when the believer and the speculative thinker are in fact one and the same person? Ought he not, in his latter capacity, to recognise that what befitted him simply as a man of faith is transcended and to that extent superseded by what he understands as a philosopher, so that in the end religion must be translated into the very different terms of philosophy?

To appreciate the nature of the dilemma we may do well to take a look at Hegel himself. By temperament and disposition he was an upholder of the traditional, of the age-old civilisation and social order of his country and people. Religion he saw as the dynamic of national culture and its most characteristic expression. Such, then, being his natural bent he could not readily do otherwise than think of himself as a Christian and a Lutheran. The forms of Protestant Christianity, according to its orthodox inheritance, were for him the embodiment of a truth which as a speculative thinker he considered to be derived not merely from the uncertain contingencies of history but from

the insights of reason itself as it contemplates the whole vast arena of mankind's experience. Indeed it was the doctrine of the Christian religion which had from the first enabled him, through its profoundly suggestive symbolism, to discern the elemental principles upon which man's knowledge of reality is founded. Thus *in his own mind* there seemed, I think, to be no essential disparity between the utterances of religious faith and the conclusions of philosophical reflection.³¹ That his followers, however, did not wholly share his confidence in this respect was soon to be demonstrated. And for some of them the master's immanentism was but the thinnest disguise for the sheer naturalism toward which his thought inevitably – and in their judgment rightly – tended.

(iv) THE DIVERSITY OF RELIGIONS

Before we conclude our discussion of some of the difficulties raised by Hegel's philosophy of religion one other problem calls to be considered if we are fully to grasp his point of view. It is that of the number and the diversity of religions. How are we to account for the many forms under which he religious consciousness has manifested itself? In particular, are we justified in grading religions according to some criterion of *worth*, and if so what is that criterion to be? Furthermore, should the 'lower' ones be expected eventually to give place to the 'higher' – indeed to the highest of all, Christianity? On the other hand, could it not be maintained that all of them are of more or less equal value, in relation to their time and circumstances? Historians, sociologists and students of comparative religion will doubtless be ready with explanations of their own, based on racial characteristics, climatic and geographical factors and differing types of civilisation. But is any of them likely to be very willing to account for religious diversity in *metaphysical* terms, since so long as naturalistic explanations suffice considerations which beg too many questions and can never themselves be proved would appear to be irrelevant? Yet Hegel himself is not at all daunted by such objections, contending that if philosophers have in the past failed to deal convincingly with the religious problem, it is – as he is never tired of saying – because they have not conceived their task in the right way: i.e.

they have not approached it *speculatively*. It is of course quite likely that the plurality and diversity of religions are capable of naturalistic interpretation at a certain level, but even if their genesis and morphology can be treated scientifically it is nonetheless true that the idea of an immanent providence or purposiveness ought not to be dismissed. In other words, the element of contingency is never to be ignored. The thinker's real task, Hegel maintains, is to arrive at a *philosophy* of religious history broad enough to comprise all the forms of man's religious self-expression.

For religion, on this showing, is Spirit's awareness of its own intrinsic nature, although, as we have seen, such awareness is attained only gradually. But if the historical religions, which can be scientifically described and classified, mark the stages or 'moments' of the actual self-realisation of Spirit then the essence of religion is implicit in all its positive embodiments, and it is the philosopher's distinctive responsibility to try to comprehend the whole complex development according to its inherent logic. To him the various religions do not represent a mere succession of contingent phenomena, but possess, rather, a rationale clear enough to disclose the inner necessity of the entire historic process. Thus in some respects Hegel's view of the plurality of religions resembles Schleiermacher's, for whom also the various ways of experiencing the divine give rise naturally to the diverse forms of the religious life. 'The positive religions', he says, 'are simply the definite forms in which religion must exhibit itself.' And again: 'Multiplicity is necessary for the complete manifestation of religion'.³² But whereas Schleiermacher finds the cause of variety in feeling, Hegel bases it on reason.

Both thinkers differ totally therefore from the eighteenth-century deists and *philosophes* in the value they attach to positive religion. For the latter all the historical religions were largely superstitious and corrupt, and at their worst a shame to humanity — in any case beyond the pale of rational justification. Yet such justification is precisely what Hegel undertakes, holding indeed that religion is one of the supreme achievements of human reason in its ongoing movement, so that to denounce it even in its cruder forms as a mere deception invented by priests is absurd. Religion, he insists, is a product of the divine Spirit — 'not a discovery of man, but a work of divine

operation and creation in him'. It is bound, then, to contain truth, in greater or less measure, even if in symbolic guise. Hence the importance of appreciating the role of *myth* in man's spiritual evolution.³³

All the same, one cannot but ask what actually is that truth towards which religion in all its expressions is thus progressively advancing. Hegel, we have seen, is convinced that the historic religions, despite their diversity, are all of them in their several ways anticipations of that *one* religion which alone merits the title 'absolute' and which he identifies with Christianity. Beyond this, presumably, religious development can proceed no further, since in the principal Christian dogmas the essence of Spirit is already fully manifested. However, the actual content of Christianity is in many respects foreshadowed by the other religions: none is without some notion, so Hegel claims, of God becoming man, while even adumbrations of the Trinity are not difficult to discover. Moreover, such beliefs, he maintains, are in the proper sense *foreshadowings* of what is to come and not simply vestiges of some primal revelation of which Christianity alone preserves the integral substance. Obviously, then, the Christian religion cannot itself be regarded as only another stage in a continuous advance, to be superseded in time by something better still. 'It is the Christian religion which is the perfect religion, the religion which represents the Being of Spirit in a realized form, or for itself, the religion which has itself become objective in relation to itself.'³⁴ The death of Christ he regards as the focal point of history, for with it begins that 'conversion of consciousness' which brings into existence the Spiritual Community wherein the 'finitude of man' ceases and the world is reconciled.³⁵

But if Christianity is the perfect religion, or religion *par excellence*, must not all other faiths and cults eventually give place to it? Hegel's view appears to be that in principle this is so, although in the actual course of history the process is likely to be exceedingly slow and perhaps never completed. A more pressing issue for the Christian philosopher is, he evidently thinks, that presented by the conflicting traditions within Christianity itself. The authentic tradition could be said to be that of the undivided church of the early centuries, when the basic Christian dogmas were formulated. Thereafter a type of Catholicism came into being which reached its apogee in the

middle ages and has now to be recognised as a crudely exaggerated objectification of the religious impulse, resulting in pietistic materialism and a quasi-political authoritarianism. By the Reformers, however, and Luther especially, the principle of liberty was reasserted, faith once again becoming 'the subjective assurance of the Eternal.'³⁶ The outcome was a complete refocusing of Christian doctrine and a return more or less to its original authenticity.³⁷

What, then, are we to conclude as to Hegel's view of the place and function of religion in the historic life of mankind? It would, overall, seem to be that religion has played and will continue to play an indispensable pedagogical role. Humanity, it teaches us, is at once finite and infinite and man a being whose essential rationality is the one ground of his freedom and apparently limitless capacity for self-enhancement. The world's religions may thus be judged each to have contributed something to his ever-deepening understanding of his own nature as spirit, so pointing forward to that ultimate realisation of the truth which it falls to philosophy alone to render conceptually explicit and complete. Christianity indeed represents the nearest approach to the universal utterance of philosophical wisdom, but every expression of man's evolving religious consciousness has its quota to offer. Only when the goal of this long and complex process is reached will the human race have attained the perfect state of freedom in self-knowledge.³⁸ Man's religious insights and aspirations, however insufficient their expression, are the most certain tokens he possesses of that life of the spirit whose fulfilment is the very reason of his existence.

References and Notes

Introduction

1. Also among its founders should be included Lessing, with his *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1780), and Herder, whose *Vom Geist der hebräischen Poesie* (1782–3) laid down the thesis that religion and literature alike are to be studied in relation to the historic development of human life and culture as a whole. Both writers had a marked influence on Hegel himself. The actual term ‘philosophy of religion’ was used by J. C. G. Schaumann (*Philosophie der Religion*, 1793) and J. Berger (*Geschichte der Religionsphilosophie*, 1800).

2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, English translation by E. B. Speirs and J. B. Sanderson (London, 1895) i, p. 22.

Hegel gave four successive courses on the philosophy of religion during his time at Berlin, viz. in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831; to which may be added the 1829 course on the proofs of God’s existence. None of them was published by the author himself. In 1832, however, a two-volume edition of *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* was brought out by his disciple Philipp Marheineke, for which the latter had used Hegel’s own corrected lecture-notes, those of two of his students (one of whom attended the 1824 course, the other that of 1827), and yet another note-book belonging to Hegel’s son Karl. He also had access to certain others of Hegel’s own papers. Some years later (1840) a considerably enlarged and altered edition appeared which, although still bearing Marheineke’s name on the title-page, was in fact the work of Bruno Bauer. For this the notes of more of Hegel’s pupils were drawn upon (now representing all four courses), as well as a revised manuscript of Hegel’s own, dating originally from 1807 and 207 pages in extent; though for both editions the editors took what can be best described as a broad view of their literary responsibilities.

It is this 1840 text that Hermann Glockner’s Jubilee Edition (Stuttgart, 1927; reprinted 1959) reproduces; and from it likewise the English version of 1895 (the only one ever published) was prepared, so that, although an altogether new – if also somewhat speculative – arrangement of the text was brought out by Georg Lasson during the years 1925–9 (reprinted

Hamburg, 1966 and 1974), I have preferred for convenience' sake to refer the reader to the Glockner edition (denoted hereafter by the letter *J*). On the whole question of the state of the text — of which no definitive edition can at present be said to exist — see A. Chapelle, *Hegel et la Religion*, I (*La Problématique*) (Paris, 1963), pp. 229–36. Quotations in English from the *Philosophy of Religion* will be given from the Speirs and Sanderson translation, reprinted by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1962 (slightly altered where I have thought fit). It will be identified by the letters *PR*.

The difficulties in the way of reconstructing an authentic text should not cause the reader to doubt that the *Vorlesungen* as we have them are a true reflection of Hegel's oral teaching. In any case it is in their existing form that they have taken their place in the history of modern thought. The textual problem therefore I have regarded as entirely secondary, indeed from my point of view negligible. What matters is the work's great philosophical interest.

3. 'Hegel', it has been said, 'was radically and throughout a theologian. All his thought began, continued, and ended in that of Divinity. We may justly say that even the religious element is pervasive of all his works' (J. McB. Sterrett, *Studies in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, 1891, p. 25). As to the real significance of Hegel's religious interest, however, opinion has differed, though the view of Georg Lukács (*Der junge Hegel*, 1948), who altogether underestimates the role of theology in the working-out of the master's philosophical doctrine, may be considered eccentric. Lukács is too anxious to make Hegel a Marxist before Marx. Karl Löwith speaks of Hegel as 'the last Christian philosopher before the break between philosophy and Christianity' (*From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. D. E. Green, 1965, p. 49).

1 The Early Theological Writings

1. See H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development. Toward the Sunlight 1770–1801* (1972) p. 73.

2. 'Über die Religion der Griechen und Römer', *Dokumente z. Hegels Entwicklung*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (1936) pp. 43–8; cf. Harris, op. cit., pp. 31–5.

3. Harris, p. 33.

4. See also the Stuttgart essay, 'On some advantages which the reading of ancient classical Greek and Roman writers secures for us', dating from Dec 1788 (Harris, pp. 75f).

5. See H. Nohl, *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften* (1907). There is a translation of part of this volume by T. M. Knox and R. Kroner, *Hegel's Early Theological Writings* (Chicago, 1948).

6. Harris gives a complete translation of the essay, pp. 481–507.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 483.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 488.

9. Nohl, op. cit., pp. 75–136. The piece carries no title in the manuscript, where the opening words are, 'Die reine aller Schranken . . .' See Harris, p. 520 for a full account of it, and pp. 162, 194–207.

10. Harris, p. 195.

11. A. T. B. Peperzak, *Le jeune Hegel et la vision morale du monde*

(The Hague, 1960) p. 66.

12. Harris, p. 198f.

13. Nohl, p. 94.

14. Hegel's own title for it is not known, as the first page of the manuscript is missing. The essay is reproduced in Nohl, pp. 152–211, and in Knox's translation, pp. 67–143. The two concluding pages of the original manuscript were added in April 1796. It is highly likely that Hegel conceived the 'Positivity' essay even before beginning the 'Life of Jesus'. Cf. Harris, pp. 207f.

15. Knox, *Hegel's Early Theological Writings*, p. 68.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

17. p. 82.

18. Hegel had already put this point succinctly in his 'Life of Jesus'. 'John the Baptist's call was: "Repent"; Christ's: "Repent and believe in the Gospel"; that of the Apostles was: "Believe in Christ"' (Nohl, p. 59. Cited Harris, p. 218).

19. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

20. Kant, we may note, similarly did not share the confidence of those who seek to promote morality by statute law. 'Woe to the legislator', he declares, 'who wishes to establish through force a polity directed to ethical ends. For in so doing he would not merely achieve the very opposite of an ethical polity, but also undermine the political State and make it insecure' (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson, New York, 1960, p. 87).

21. Knox, p. 100.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 101f.

23. Hegel's whole discussion here owes much to Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, published in 1783, in which the eminent Jewish thinker insisted on the need for a rigid separation of the church from the state.

24. In an earlier (1794) fragment ('Unter objektiver Religion': Nohl, pp. 48–50; Harris, pp. 508–10) he had written: 'To make objective religion subjective must be the great concern of the State, the institutions of which must be consistent with the freedom of the individual dispositions so as not to do violence to conscience and to freedom, but to work indirectly on the determining grounds of the will – how much can the State do? How much must be left to each individual man?'

25. Hegel points out, incidentally, that the neglect of religious education in childhood cannot be made good in later life, when it will scarcely be possible 'so effectively to impress the faith on the marrow of the soul or to twine it round every branch of human thought and capacity, every branch of endeavour and will' (Knox, p. 116).

26. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

28. Sometime between Dec 1795 and Mar 1796 Hegel drafted a fragment called 'A Positive Faith' (*Ein positiver Glaub*) (Nohl, pp. 233–9; no English translation of it has yet been published), possibly at first intended as a conclusion to the 'Positivity' essay. Here again Hegel is concerned with the error of regarding faith merely as *objective*, i.e. authoritative doctrine, according to which truth is supposed to be 'given'

and he who accepts it as such has simply to do what he can to make it his personal conviction (i.e. 'subjective').

29. *Der Geist des Christenthums und sein Schicksal*. The first fragment dates from the early part of 1797, the several pieces being put together after revision and with additions by Hegel himself in 1799, or perhaps early in 1800. Cf. Harris, pp. 330–2.

30. Knox, p. 185.

31. 'The whole world Abraham regarded as simply his opposite; if he did not take it to be a nullity, he looked on it as sustained by the God who was alien to it' (Knox, p. 187).

32. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 230f.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

40. This section combines two fragments which exist separately in earlier manuscript drafts, 'Das Wesen des Jesus' and 'Mit dem Mute und dem Glauben'. But the result has been to make the author's meaning rather less clear. Cf. Harris, p. 370.

41. Knox, p. 285.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 301.

45. See the early fragment 'Religion ist eine . . .', in Nohl, p. 20.

46. 'Unter objektiven Religion', Nohl, p. 49.

47. Nohl, pp. 345–8; Knox, pp. 309–13. Cf. Harris, pp. 379–92. The theme of love as the principle of reconciliation and unification seems to have occupied Hegel in a paper written in November 1797, although very considerably revised a year later when he had already completed the first draft of 'The Spirit of Christianity' (see Nohl, pp. 378–82, Knox, pp. 302–8. Cf. Harris, pp. 298–310). Unfortunately even of the small portion of it that survives exact interpretation is far from easy.

48. Knox, p. 310.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

50. *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*. The word *Geist* should be translated 'spirit' rather than 'mind', although the two English words do represent the German, and it is not always easy to decide which provides the better rendering. The fact is that the German carries overtones of meaning which neither of the English words precisely conveys. As Hegel uses it *Geist* refers to the mind of man and to the 'divine' or 'cosmic' mind.

2 What Is Religion?

1. *PR.*, i, pp. 1f; *J.*, XV, pp. 1f.

2. *PR.*, i, p. 119.

3. Hegel's objection to the eighteenth-century disdain of church

dogma is that the rationalism from which it springs is no more than a mere appeal for 'reasonableness'. He utterly deplores the fact that 'into the religious world generally there has entered a widespread indifference towards what in earlier times were held to be essential doctrines of the faith' (*PR.*, i, p. 38). Rightly understood dogmas are the forms in which the eternal truths of religion come to expression. A merely detached and dilettante attitude to doctrine is also exhibited, Hegel considers, by those who confine their study of theology simply to its history. 'If the philosophical knowledge of religion is conceived of as something to be reached historically only, then we should have to regard the theologians who have brought it to this point like clerks in a mercantile house, who have only to keep an account of the wealth of strangers, acting only for others without obtaining any property for themselves' (*PR.*, i, p. 41).

4. 'To believe in God is thus in its simplicity something different from when a man, reflectively and with the consciousness that something else stands opposed to faith, says "I believe in God"' (*PR.*, i, p. 7).

5. *PR.*, i, p. 221; *J.*, XV, p. 231.

6. The place Hegel appears to assign to divine grace sets him apart from Kant, to whom the term conveyed little. He even goes so far as to say that before God man seems only a passive creature, 'like a stone'. 'The divine grace is to come to pass in me and through me. My giving up myself and receiving divine grace is my own act, and at the same time God's act, so that "it is no longer I that live, but God that liveth in me". I have to open myself to the incoming Spirit in order that I may be spiritual.' The paradox of grace is that it is at once man's act and God's; but it marks the divergence between religion and moralism. 'To morality the good is an unrealized something in a God-forsaken world, an ideal which the categorical imperative lays upon my subjective human will to realize. Thus the circle of moral activity is limited. In religion, on the contrary, the good, the reconciliation, is absolutely accomplished' (*PR.*, i, p. 228; *J.*, XV, p. 238).

7. *PR.*, i, p. 7; *J.*, XV, pp. 24f.

8. *PR.*, i, p. 9; *J.*, XV, pp. 26f.

9. *PR.*, i, p. 15; *J.*, XV, p. 32.

10. *PR.*, i, p. 16.

11. Cf. *PR.*, i, p. 127 (*J.*, XV, p. 139): 'I am, as feeling, something entirely special or particular, I am thoroughly immersed in determinateness, and am in the strict sense of the word subjective only, without objectivity and without universality.'

12. Cf. *PR.*, i, p. 128: 'Religious feeling . . . contains in its content, in its very determinateness, not only the necessity but the reality of the opposition itself, and consequently contains reflection.'

13. *PR.*, i, p. 133.

14. 'God exists essentially in thought' (*PR.*, i, p. 132).

15. *PR.*, i, p. 131; *J.*, XV, p. 143. *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace as *The Logic of Hegel* (1873; 2nd ed., 1892) pp. 35f.

16. Cf. Wallace, op. cit., pp. 36f.

17. This content is that which has 'validity in and for itself', remaining

substantially fixed or settled as compared with the fluctuations of merely individual suppositions and opinions, as well as inflexible in comparison with individual desires and preferences (*PR.*, i, p. 143).

18. From *begreifen*, to contain or comprise; hence, to conceive, comprehend. Cf. Lat. *concipere*. To translate *Begriff* by the word 'notion', as has customarily been the case in England, is very weak.

19. *PR.*, p. 147.

20. Cf. Wallace, op. cit., p. 143: 'Thought, as *Understanding*, sticks to fixity of characters and their distinctness from one another: every such limited abstract it treats as having a subsistence and being of its own.'

21. *PR.*, p. 145; *J.*, XV, p. 158.

22. *PR.*, p. 146.

23. Cf. O. Pfleiderer, *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant and its Progress in Great Britain since 1825* (1893), p. 73: 'Religion is . . . to a certain extent an exoteric philosophy for the general community, while philosophy is the esoteric knowledge of the truth of religion.'

24. Cf. Wallace, op. cit., pp. xxf.

25. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 144.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 147f, 152.

28. The term 'speculative' is used because in a genuine philosophy, according to Hegel, the concept is reflected in objects as though in a mirror (Lat. *speculum*).

3 The Main Types of Religion

1. *PR.*, i, p. 270.

2. *PR.*, i, p. 274.

3. *PR.*, i, p. 279; *J.*, XV, p. 288.

4. *PR.*, i, p. 287.

5. *PR.*, i, p. 291. But it is a kind of 'unfree freedom', Hegel points out, whereby the individual self-consciousness knows itself by direct intuition as something which is higher than any natural object (p. 294).

6. *PR.*, i, p. 298 ('Not a good in the magician, but the magician himself is the conjurer and conqueror of nature.').

7. Cf. *Encyclopaedia*, 151 (Wallace, op. cit., p. 274).

8. *PR.*, i, p. 333.

9. *PR.*, i, p. 336.

10. *PR.*, i, p. 346.

11. *PR.*, ii, p. 17.

12. *PR.*, ii, p. 6. But an inertia that is passive in its creativity — 'like, as it were, a woman'.

13. *PR.*, ii, p. 23.

14. 'In consciousness which says, 'I am Brahma', all virtues and vices, all gods, and finally the Trimurti itself, vanishes' (*PR.*, ii, p. 23; *J.*, XV, p. 390).

15. *PR.*, ii, p. 47.

16. *PR.*, ii, p. 48; *J.*, XV, p. 400.

17. *PR.*, ii, p. 51.

18. *PR.*, ii, p. 60.
19. *PR.*, ii, p. 61.
20. *PR.*, ii, pp. 68f; *J.*, XV, pp. 420f.
21. *PR.*, ii, p. 71.
22. *PR.*, ii, p. 73.
23. *PR.*, ii, p. 78.
24. *PR.*, ii, p. 83; *J.*, XV, p. 434.
25. *PR.*, ii, pp. 101f.
26. *PR.*, ii, p. 106; *J.*, XV, p. 456.
27. *PR.*, ii, p. 123; *J.*, XVI, p. 4.
28. *PR.*, ii, p. 128; *J.*, XVI, p. 8.
29. From *aufheben*, to abrogate, annul, cancel. In Hegel's usage the verb combines this ordinary meaning with the less common one of both 'setting aside' and 'preserving'. Thus in the dialectic a lower stage is at once cancelled and maintained – 'sublated' as an element in a higher synthesis.
30. In the idea of concrete spirit 'the natural itself stands over against the spiritual as finite, as the other side of that essentiality, that substantiality, which we call God' (*PR.*, ii, p. 167; *J.*, XVI, p. 44: 'Das Natürliche selbst als Endliches gegenübersteht, als andere Seite zu jener Wesentlichkeit, jenem Substantiellen, dem Gott'). 31.
31. *PR.*, ii, p. 174. Cf. p. 172.
32. *PR.*, ii, p. 175.
33. *PR.*, ii, p. 186; *J.*, XVI, p. 60.
34. *PR.*, ii, p. 192.
35. *PR.*, ii, p. 194.
36. *PR.*, ii, pp. 206f; *J.*, XVI, p. 79.
37. 'The fear in which the servant regards himself as nothing gains for him the restoration of his justification (*Berechtigung*)' (*J.*, XVI, p. 126).
38. *PR.*, ii, p. 235.
39. Thus 'the work of art involves the fact that God and man are no longer beings alien to one another, but have been taken up into a higher unity' (*Aufhebung*) (*PR.*, ii, p. 256; *J.*, XVI, p. 126).
40. *PR.*, ii, pp. 257f; *J.*, XVI, p. 127.
41. *PR.*, ii, 259.
42. *PR.*, ii, 269.
43. *PR.*, ii, p. 263.
44. *PR.*, ii, p. 298; *J.*, XVI, p. 165.
45. *PR.*, ii, p. 301.

4 The Absolute Religion: Christianity

1. Necessary because inherent in the universal concept itself: 'Religions, as they follow one another, are determined by means of the Concept. Their nature and succession are not determined from without; on the contrary, they are determined by the nature of Spirit which has entered into the world to bring itself to consciousness of itself' (*PR.*, p. 79; *J.*, XV, p. 94).

2. Hegel's broad classification of the positive religions can itself be said to exhibit the threefold principle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis which forms the basic pattern of his entire world-view. Thus leaving aside

primitive religion, we see how the religions of nature represent the stage — the pantheistic — at which the universal element is recognised to the exclusion of the individual. The religions of spirit, by contrast, do recognise the place and importance of the individual, but see nature as an alien power, and hence are concerned to stress man's independence of it and dominion over it. But it is not until Christianity appears that spirit and nature are synthesised by the former's rediscovering itself in the latter, so uniting transcendence and immanence. The dualistic religions — those of Persia, Syria and Egypt — are, as has been shown, only an intermediate stage between those of nature and spiritual individuality. On the whole subject of Hegel's classification of religions see J. Pünjer, *Geschichte der Christlichen Religionsphilosophie seit der Reformation* (1880–3; repr. 1969) ii, pp. 255f.

3. Cf. *Encyclopaedia*, 564: 'God is God only in so far as he knows himself: his self-knowledge is his self-consciousness in man; it is the knowledge man has of God, which advances to man's self-knowledge in God' (W. Wallace, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* [1894] p. 176). In the *Philosophy of Religion* Hegel cites the words of Eckhart to the effect that 'the eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him; my eye and his eye are one' (i, pp. 217f; *J.*, XV, p. 228).

4. *PR.*, ii, p. 330.

5. *Ibid.* Cf. p. 205: 'Religion is therefore a relation of the spirit to absolute Spirit: thus only is Spirit as that which knows also that which is known. This is not merely an attitude of the spirit towards absolute Spirit, but absolute Spirit itself is that which is the self-relating element, which brings itself into relation with that which we posited on the other side as the element of difference. Thus when we rise higher, religion is the Idea of the Spirit which relates itself to its own self — it is the self-consciousness of absolute Spirit' (*J.*, XV, p. 216).

6. Cf. Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (1957), pp. 8–12.

7. 'The great advance which marks our time consists in the recognition of subjectivity as an absolute moment' (*PR.*, ii, p. 331). For Hegel the objectivity is itself *within* the subject, providing the content of his experience, since 'what has no objectivity has no content'.

8. *PR.*, i, pp. 84f. *J.*, XV, p. 100.

9. *PR.*, i, p. 33. Cf. i, p. 205: 'In the Idea in its highest form religion is not a transaction of man, but is essentially the higher determination of the absolute Idea itself' (*J.*, XV, p. 216).

10. *PR.*, ii, p. 335; *J.*, XVI, p. 198.

11. *PR.*, ii, p. 337; *J.*, XVI, p. 200.

12. *PR.*, ii, p. 340.

13. *PR.*, ii, p. 342.

14. *PR.*, ii, p. 345; *J.*, XVI, p. 207.

15. *PR.*, i, p. 38.

16. *PR.*, i, p. 41; *J.*, XVI, p. 41.

17. *PR.*, ii, p. 345.

18. *PR.*, ii, p. 346; *J.*, XVI, p. 207.

19. *PR.*, ii, p. 347.

20. The English translation by J. Sibree was first published in 1858. It

is this which is quoted in the present work.

21. Cf. *Encycl.*, 163f. 'Universality, particularity, and individuality' says Hegel, 'are taken in the abstract, the same as identity, difference, and ground. But the universal is the self-identical, with the express qualification, that it simultaneously contains the particular and the individual' (Wallace, *Logic of Hegel*, p. 294).

22. *PR.*, iii, p. 25. 'They [i.e. unphilosophically-minded Christians] believe in it, and have already vouchsafed to them the highest truth, even though they apprehend it only in the form of a popular or figurative idea, without being conscious of the necessary nature of this truth, and without grasping it in its entirety or comprehending it.'

23. The difference here between Hegel's view and Kant's is entire. For Kant God is *noumenal* only — unknowable, that is, to the 'pure' or scientific reason, though postulated (not proved) by the 'practical' reason, or moral faith.

24. *PR.*, iii, p. 10.

25. *PR.*, iii, p. 11; *J.*, XVI, pp. 227f.

26. *PR.*, iii, p. 17.

27. *PR.*, iii, p. 33; *J.*, XVI, p. 246. On Hegel's use of the term *speculative* see Ch. 2, footnote 28. (p. below).

28. *PR.*, iii, p. 35; *J.*, XVI, p. 248.

29. *PR.*, iii, pp. 36f; *J.*, XVI, p. 250.

30. *PR.*, iii, p. 37; *J.*, XVI, p. 250.

31. For Hegel's interpretation of the biblical myth of the Fall see *PR.*, iii, pp. 53f. Sin implies knowledge, but it is a knowledge, he argues, which 'supplies also the principle of man's divineness, a principle which by a process of self-adjustment or elimination of difference must reach a condition of reconciliation or truth; or in other words, it involves the promise and certainty of attaining once more the state in which man is the image of God' (p. 54). Cf. *Philosophy of History*, p. 333.

32. *PR.*, iii, p. 52.

33. *PR.*, iii, p. 59; *J.*, XVI, p. 270.

34. *PR.*, i, p. 226.

35. *PR.*, iii, pp. 76f; *J.*, XVI, pp. 286f.

36. *PR.*, iii, p. 86.

37. Hegel's stress on the inwardness of faith, the subjectivity of conviction, should be noted. 'The real attestation of the divinity of Christ', he says, 'is the witness of one's own spirit — not miracles; for only spirit recognizes the Spirit' (*Phil. of Hist.*, p. 338).

38. *Phil. of Hist.* p. 340.

39. *PR.*, iii, p. 121.

40. *PR.*, iii, p. 124; *J.*, XVI, p. 330.

41. *PR.*, iii, pp. 127, 132; *J.*, XVI, p. 338.

42. *PR.*, iii, p. 128. Cf. p. 129: 'This is the business of the Church — this training whereby the education of the spirit becomes ever more inward; the truth thus becoming identical with self, with the will of the individual — becoming his will, his spirit' (*J.*, XVI, pp. 335f).

43. *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 343.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 345.

45. Hegel distinguishes the spiritual (*geistig*) kingdom from the ecclesiastical (*geistlich*).

46. *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 345: 'Speculative conviction does not yet rest on a basis of its own, but is content to inhere in the spirit of an extrinsic authority.'

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 429f.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

5 *Man's Knowledge of God*

1. Cf. e.g. E. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington, U.S.A., 1968).

2. *PR.*, i, p. 119.

3. Cf. C. C. J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (1926) p. 20.

4. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (1933 imp.) p. 29.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 506.

6. Jacobi, who when he died in 1819 was President of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, had spent part of his earlier life at Düsseldorf, where his house became a meeting-place for some of the leading figures in the intellectual scene of that time. Goethe, Wieland, Lessing, Herder and Hamann were all friends of his. The two last-named in particular strongly influenced his thinking. Jacobi's most important publications were *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau, 1785; enlarged ed. 1798) and *Über das Unternehmen des Kritizismus, die Vernunft zu Verstande zu bringen* (Hamburg, 1801). His *Sämtliche Werke* appeared between 1812 and 1824.

7. *Sämtliche Werke*, iii, p. 216.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 441.

9. *Reden über die Religion an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*. A second and considerably revised edition came out in 1806. A third edition, with explanatory notes, was issued immediately after the publication of the author's principal literary achievement, the *Christliche Glaube*, in 1821. It is this latter edition which was used for John Oman's English version, published 1893.

10. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Oman (Harper Torchbooks ed.) p. 36.

11. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 43.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

13. *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (1928) pp. 16f.

14. *Encycl.*, 73 (Wallace, *Logic*, p. 136).

15. *Encycl.*, 63 (Wallace, p. 125).

16. Hegel complains in his Preface to the second (1827) edition of the *Encyclopaedia* that 'in modern times religion has more and more contracted the intellectual expansion of its contents and withdrawn into the intensiveness of piety, or even of feeling — a feeling which betrays its own scantiness and emptiness', stressing the point that 'so long however as it

still has a creed, a doctrine, a system of dogma, it has what philosophy can occupy itself with and where it can find for itself a point of union with religion' (cf. Wallace, p. xxi).

17. *Encycl.*, 65 (Wallace, p. 128).

18. Cf. *Encycl.*, 74 (Wallace, p. 138). 'Immediacy means, upon the whole, an abstract reference to itself, that is, an abstract identity in abstract universality'. See too the 'Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God' in *PR.*, iii, p. 177; *J.*, XVI, p. 382: 'If we look closely into what we understand by immediacy it will be seen that it must exist in itself without any difference such as that through which mediation is at once posited. It is a simple reference to self, and is thus in its immediate form merely Being.' Cf. p. 175.

19. *Encycl.*, 74 (Wallace, p. 138). Cf. also *Encycl.*, 50 (Wallace, p. 105).

20. See Hegel's preface to H. F. W. Hinrich's *Die Religion iminneren Verhältniss zur Wissenschaft* (Heidelberg, 1822) in *Hegel's Berliner Schriften*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (1944 repr.) pp. 346f.

21. K. Rosenkranz, *G. W. F. Hegels Leben* (1844; repr. 1969), pp. 346f.

22. *PR.*, i, p. 51; *J.*, XV, p. 68.

23. 'This immediate knowledge consists in knowing that the Infinite, the Eternal, the God which is in our idea, really is: or, it asserts that in our consciousness there is immediately and inseparably bound up with this idea the certainty of its actual being' (*Encycl.*, 64; Wallace, p. 126).

24. *PR.*, iii, p. 229; *J.*, XVI, pp. 427f.

25. *Encycl.*, 67 (Wallace, p. 130).

26. *Encycl.*, 50 (Wallace, p. 103).

27. *PR.* ('Proofs') iii, p. 229. *J.*, XVI, p. 404.

28. *PR.*, iii, p. 164; *J.*, XVI, p. 369.

29. Cf. *Encycl.*, 71 (Wallace, p. 135: 'There can be nothing shorter or more convenient than to have the bare assertion to make, that we discover a fact in our own consciousness, and are certain that it is true; and to declare that this certainty, instead of proceeding from our particular mental constitution only, belongs to the very nature of the mind.').

30. *PR.*, iii, p. 231.

31. *De natura deorum*, II, ii.

32. In finding the origin of religion in the necessary and universal 'elevation of the soul to God' Hegel is not making an historical judgment, because we are not in possession of the facts about religion at its historically primitive stage. As I have said, he recognises that the great positive religions had their beginnings in what usually is claimed to have been a specific revelation, or at least in the influence of creative religious personalities. But it has to be remembered that such alleged revelations, with their accompanying doctrines and disciplines, could have been effective only on the supposition that man has within him some kind of natural feeling for the divine, on the strength of which he is able to make the needed response. And that is all that Hegel is positing.

33. *PR.*, iii, p. 161.

34. *PR.*, iii, p. 231.

35. *PR.*, iii, p. 156; *J.*, XVI, p. 360.
36. *Encycl.*, 65 (Wallace, p. 129): 'The intrinsic and self-affirming unity of immediacy and mediation'.
37. *Encycl.*, 50 (Wallace, p. 132).
38. *PR.*, iii, p. 189.
39. *zum Behufe der Erkenntniss*, 'as an aid to knowledge'.
40. *PR.*, iii, pp. 166f; *J.*, XVI, pp. 370f.
41. *PR.*, iii, p. 167.
42. *PR.*, iii, pp. 201f.
43. *PR.*, iii, p. 180.
44. *PR.*, iii, pp. 213f.
45. *PR.*, iii, p. 236; *J.*, XVI, p. 434.
46. *PR.*, iii, p. 269; *J.*, XVI, p. 466. For an extended discussion of what Hegel means by necessity see 'Proofs', Lecture 11 (pp. 266–80).
47. *Critique*, p. 511.
48. *PR.*, iii, pp. 242f; *J.*, XVI, pp. 440f.
49. *PR.*, iii, p. 246.
50. *Critique*, p. 511.
51. *PR.*, iii, pp. 247f; *J.*, XVI, pp. 445f.
52. As Hegel elsewhere expresses it: 'Consider Nature, and Nature will lead to God; you will find an absolute final cause: do not mean that it is we who proceed to God himself from another; and in this way God, though the consequence is also the absolute ground of the initial step. The relation of the two things is reversed; and what came as a consequence being shown to be antecedent, the original antecedent is reduced to a consequence. This is always the way whenever reason demonstrates' (*Encycl.*, 36; Wallace, p. 75).
53. *Encycl.*, 50 (Wallace, p. 104). Cf. *Ibid.*: 'If the world is only a sum of incidents, it follows that it is also deciduous and phenomenal, in *esse* and *posse* null'.
54. *PR.*, iii, p. 264.
55. *Encycl.*, 50 (Wallace, p. 103).
56. *PR.*, ii, pp. 157f.
57. *Critique*, p. 520.
58. *Memorabilia*, i.
59. *PR.*, iii, p. 328; *J.*, XVI, p. 546.
60. *PR.*, iii, p. 332.
61. *PR.*, iii, p. 334.
62. *PR.*, iii, p. 335.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *PR.*, iii, p. 338.
65. *PR.*, iii, p. 344; *J.*, XVI, p. 532.
66. *PR.*, iii, p. 341.
67. Curiously Hegel gives very little attention to Kant's moral argument for divine existence.
68. *PR.*, iii, p. 344; *J.*, XVI, p. 532.
69. *PR.*, iii, p. 343; *J.*, XVI, p. 531.
70. *Proslogion*, 2.
71. *Critique*, pp. 505f.

72. *PR.*, iii, p. 361. The ontological argument, rejected by St Thomas Aquinas, was reformulated by Descartes (*Meditations métaphysiques*, V), as also by Leibniz. Christian Wolff (1679–1754), professor of mathematics and natural science at the university of Halle, elaborated a system of philosophical rationalism which largely dominated the German universities in the latter part of the eighteenth century and which provides the background for Kant's critical philosophy.

73. *PR.*, iii, pp. 363f.

6 Some Problems of Interpretation

1. Cf. C. Bruaire, *Logique et religion chrétienne dans la philosophie de Hegel* (1964).

2. Cf. *Encycl.*, 564.

3. *PR.*, i, p. 97; *J.*, XV, p. 110. See also *PR.*, ii, pp. 214–17 and iii, p. 319.

4. In Hegel's first published work, *Differenz des Fichtischen und Schellingschen Systems* ('Difference between the Philosophical Systems of Fichte and Schelling'), which appeared in 1801, soon after his appointment as *Privatdozent* at Jena, he conveyed the impression that he was a fairly convinced disciple of Schelling, an impression strengthened by his collaboration with Schelling (1802–3) in editing the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*. But by the time the latter left Jena in 1803 Hegel's thinking had already diverged from his friend's in some fundamental respects, as was manifest a few years later when he brought out his *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in which he emphatically rejected Schelling's conception of the Absolute as undifferentiated and knowable only by an act of mystical intuition. 'We see speculative contemplation identified with the dissolution of the distinct and determinate, or rather with hurling it down, without more ado and without justification, into the abyss of vacuity.' Indeterminate self-identity meant an Absolute comparable with 'the night in which, as we say, all cows are black' and was thus 'the naivety of empty knowledge' (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J. B. Baillie [2nd ed., 1931] p. 79.) Schelling was not mentioned by name, but the allusion was unmistakable, and a personal coolness between the two philosophers resulted.

5. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel represents the systems of Plato, Aristotle, the medieval scholastics, Spinoza and Leibniz as successive dialectical moments in a developing process of philosophical understanding which has its culmination in his own system. As part of that process each in turn was not only valuable but necessary. Error arises only when a single phase is treated as the whole. Thus the history of philosophy is not simply a chronicle of ideas but a rationale of the movement of human thought at its highest level.

6. In spite of the ambiguities of Hegel's doctrine his followers were able to preserve more or less the unity of the school during his lifetime. But after his death rifts began to appear, such as were soon to lead to a classification of his interpreters into Right, Left and Centre, the point of divergence, at least at this stage, being the theological issue. Right-wing Hegelians, of whom R. F. Göschl (1781–1861) was the original represen-

tative, maintained that Hegel's philosophy is essentially theistic, as likewise that it teaches personal immortality. On the other hand the Leftist trend had showed itself even before Hegel's death in L. A. Feuerbach (1804–72), whose *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* ('Thoughts on Death and Immortality') came out in 1830. In this he denied individual immortality and construed the whole Hegelian doctrine in a pantheistic sense. But the real split came with the publication some five years later of D. F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*, in which the more conservative of the master's disciples could see only a radical and subversive departure from his own position. Broadly speaking the Right composed all who interpreted the Hegelian logic theistically: Hegel himself, they claimed, had believed in a personal God and in immortality, and indeed had regarded himself as a good Lutheran. Of these the extreme Right was occupied by Göschl, more moderate positions being adopted by G. A. Gabler (1786–1853), L. von Henning, J. E. Erdmann and J. Schaller. The Centre, naturally enough, considered its interpretations to be true to the master's own intention, although even they veered somewhat to one side or another as the case might be, the 'Right' being identified with Hegel's biographer Karl Rosenkranz (1805–79), and the first editor of his *Philosophie der Religion*, P. K. Marheineke, the 'Left' with C. L. Michelet and W. Vatke. But among the 'young Hegelians' of the Extreme Left Strauss, Feuerbach and Max Stirner (Johann Kaspar Schmidt) (1806–56) were conspicuous.

Strauss was teaching in the Protestant Faculty at Tübingen – the *Stift* – when he published his *Life of Jesus* in 1835 (an English trans. by George Eliot appeared in 1846). In this he entirely rejected any supernaturalistic view of Christianity, dwelling instead on the role of myth in the formation of the gospel tradition and going on to maintain that the growth of primitive Christianity was to be understood in terms of the Hegelian dialectic. But there was already latent in Strauss's position a naturalistic and anti-religious bent which became overt in his next important work, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft dargestellt* ('The Christian Doctrine of Faith in its Development and in its Struggle with Modern Science') (1840–1), a highly polemical account of the history of Christian doctrine from its New Testament origins until what he regarded as its final dissolution in the Hegelian philosophy. His last work, *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (1872) (*The Old Faith and the New*, English trans. 1873) eliminates Christianity entirely in favour of scientific naturalism.

Feuerbach likewise made the transition from Hegelian pantheism or immanentism to materialism, and indeed more rapidly than did Strauss. By 1839 he had become disillusioned with Hegel's 'rational mysticism', and in his best-known work, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841) (*The Essence of Christianity*, English trans. by George Eliot, 1854) he gave no more quarter to a speculative philosophy of religion than to Christian theology itself. 'My first thought', he states, 'has been God, my second reason, my third man.' Theology had been displaced by Hegelian rationalism, but the latter must yield in its turn to a philosophy of humanity, to *anthropology*. Thus the Christian dogmas can at last be interpreted in their true sense, a

purely humanistic one, as symbols of man's own ideals, hitherto alienated and absolutised as divine attributes. They are 'counter-truths' in the most literal meaning of the word, and have only to be reversed for their real signification to be revealed. Thus the saying 'God is love' or 'God is merciful' in fact states that love or mercy is divine; and so on. In spite, however, of this drastic change of viewpoint, *The Essence of Christianity* preserves a distinctly Hegelian tone, at least in its terminology. Feuerbach's next publication, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* ('Basic Propositions of the Philosophy of the Future') (1843) makes it clear that the transformation of theology into anthropology is still, in the author's opinion, too much imbued with both religious feeling and speculative thought any longer to satisfy him, whereas the philosophy of the future would present itself as an unqualified materialism.

Max Stirner, in his *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* ('The Individual and his Property') (1845) goes far beyond either Strauss or Feuerbach along the path of individual anarchism. The latter he thinks cannot free himself from religious attitudes: his 'Mankind' is as much a dogmatic abstraction as Hegel's 'Absolute Spirit'. The only real existence is the individual self, not in the sense of some universal essence but as a wholly unique entity. The altruism extolled by Feuerbach is a mere secularisation of Christian 'charity'. Max Stirner thus represents the furthest point of the reaction against Hegel while at the same time remaining subject to its influence, although practically nothing of the original system survives and the dialectical method is totally abandoned. He is in fact more of an anti-Hegelian than Karl Marx, and in his uncompromising individualism recalls Kierkegaard.

Thus basically the Right and Left wings of Hegelianism divide on the meaning of the Absolute. The former interpret the Idea in terms of a transcendent divine Spirit, the God of Christian theism; whereas for the latter it is simply an abstraction, a 'principle' the existence of which is realised only in the order of nature and which is apprehended as such by the human intelligence. In the case of the extreme Left this implies a purely naturalistic or materialistic view of reality. See also note 8 below.

Hegel's position with regard to personal immortality is less ambiguous. What for him is eternal is the absolute Idea. Thus in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* he writes:

The immortality of the soul must not be represented as first entering the sphere of reality only at a later stage; it is the actual present quality of Spirit; Spirit is eternal, and for this reason is already present. Spirit, as possessed of freedom, does not belong to the sphere of things limited; as being what thinks and knows in an absolute way, it has the Universal for its object; this is eternity, which is not simply duration, as duration can be predicated of mountains, but knowledge (*PR.*, iii, p. 57).

And he goes on: 'Man is immortal in consequence of knowledge, for it is only as a thinking being that he is not a mortal animal soul, and is a free, pure soul. Reasoned knowledge, thought, is the root of his life, of his immortality as a totality in himself' (*Ibid.*, p. 58; *J.*, XVI, pp. 268f.). Furthermore, the soul has no real being apart from its relation to the body

(cf. *Encycl.*, 389: 'The soul is no separate immaterial entity. Wherever there is Nature, the soul is its universal Immaterialism, its simple "ideal" life' [Wallace, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, p. 12]). Also whatever is inadequate to the universal is doomed to disappear (cf. *Encycl.*, 374–5). Thus death would appear to be the end of all personal consciousness. It is extremely doubtful whether Hegel himself believed in personal survival after death. His orthodox critics censured him on that account.

Light is thrown on the foregoing questions by a consideration of Hegel's views on the relation of religion to the state. What religion does is, in essence, to bring home to man the truth of his rationality and freedom – a function in which Christianity succeeds supremely. On the other hand it falls to philosophy to articulate this in explicitly rational terms – to express religious insights through the categories of pure thought. Yet neither religion with its images nor philosophy with its concepts can realise human reason and freedom fully *in practice*. For this the concrete life of society itself is necessary. Hence the role and significance of the state, which, as the organisation of society in all its aspects, exists to secure liberty on the basis of man's intrinsic rationality. Thus if religion, philosophy and the state may be said to have a common end – if the function of the state is to achieve in its sphere the fundamental objectives of religion – then a positive relation between the two must be envisaged. And if Christianity is the one completely adequate religion then the state which most clearly fulfils its *raison d'être* must be a Christian one, for in such alone can rationality and freedom be finally attained – though the Christianity Hegel is speaking of is of course Protestantism: Catholicism, in 'externalising the entire order of the divine, introduces an arbitrary authoritarianism which is in fact a betrayal of the very principle – the autonomy of the human spirit – which the religion of Christ is destined to manifest. The implications of Hegel's thinking thus become apparent: religion achieves its true purpose in the collective life of the state – 'the divine idea on earth', he calls it, or even 'this actual God'. The salvation of the individual in some 'other-worldly' existence has therefore no real meaning. 'Eternal life' is the self-realisation of spirit under the conditions made possible by the free development of human society, and under no others.

7. In his repudiation of all 'transcendent' reality Hegel is in line with Spinoza, and while he remained under the influence of Schelling, whose philosophy of identity he characterised as 'Kantian Spinozism', he largely endorsed Spinoza's doctrine of immanence. But with his gradual separation from Schelling the distance between his own thinking and that of the great seventeenth-century philosopher also widened. Spinozism as a philosophy of *substance* he now indeed rejected, alike as a metaphysic of the 'understanding' and as based on mathematical procedures which he regarded as appropriate only to a purely quantitative view of things. Although he continued to adhere to the principle of immanence he could not concede that the various attributes and modes of being belonged to substance itself; they would have to be deduced from it as necessary differentiations. What Spinoza's system so obviously lacked was any kind of dialectical development, such as permeated Hegel's own thought and

through. Spinozism was correct in holding that every determination is a negation, but it overlooks the inevitable *negation of the negation*, which supplies the dynamic of advance in reality as in thought. Spinoza's Absolute is an infinite receptacle that merely *contains* finite beings. Hegel's on the other hand, is subject rather than substance; reality is process, becoming, development (*Entwicklung*). For the former the Absolute is *at once* extension and thought; for the latter it is *successively* matter and spirit. Spinoza's determinism is mechanistic, and finality is illusory. To Hegel, however, determinism involves finality: determinism and destination (*Bestimmung*) are one, and the 'end' of nature is spirit.

8. Diversity in the interpretation of Hegel's meaning continues to this day. Thus his modern editor Georg Lasson (*Einführung in Hegels Religionsphilosophie* (1930), maintains that the Hegelian doctrine is a recognisably Christian philosophy, while some even go so far as to consider it genuinely orthodox and that when Hegel speaks of the Spirit it is nothing other than the Holy Spirit of the New Testament and the church's creeds that he is referring to (e.g. C. G. Schweitzer, 'Zur Methode des Hegel-Interpretation' and 'Geist bei Hegel und Heiliger Geist' in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 1963, pp. 248–62, and 1964, pp. 318–28, respectively). (E. Hirsch, in *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum* [1926], says that Hegel's fault is not in being too little of a Christian, but, contrariwise, in having constructed 'a philosophical' and scientific vision of the world resting largely on ideas accessible only to Christians' (quoted Schweitzer, 'Zur Methode', p. 262). Others, however, suggest that although Hegel may have thought of himself as a theist and a Christian the principles of his system are inescapably pantheistic. Cf. Th. Haering, *Hegel, sein Wollen und sein Werk*, i (1949) p. 547. Finally, there are those who regard Hegelianism as a logical pantheism of the most thoroughgoing kind and entirely dissolvent of Christianity (e.g. K. Löwith, 'Hegels Aufhebung der christlichen Religion', *Einsichten*, 156–203); A. Kojève, *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel* (2nd ed., 1947) and G. Garaudy, *Dieu est mort: Étude sur Hegel* (1970), and the Marxist commentators generally, give an atheistic interpretation of Hegel.

9. *PR.*, ii, p. 188.

10. *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 337. Cf. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (trans. E. S. Haldane, 1893) i. p. 71.

11. *PR.*, i, p. 38.

12. *PR.*, i, p. 210.

13. *PR.*, ii, p. 206.

14. *De praescript. haeret.*, vii.

15. *PR.*, ii, p. 341.

16. *PR.*, ii, p. 334: 'The character we ascribe to God's revelation of himself is that of something arbitrary, accidental, as it were, and not that of something belonging to the concept of God.'

17. Cf. *PR.*, ii, p. 342: 'The most contradictory meanings have been exegetically demonstrated by means of theology out of the Scriptures, and thus the so-called Holy Scriptures have been made into a nose of wax. All heresies have, in common with the Church, appealed to the Scriptures.'

18. Ibid.
19. *PR.*, iii, p. 126.
20. *PR.*, i, p. 27.
21. *PR.*, iii, p. 125; *J.*, XVI, p. 332.
22. *PR.*, i, p. 41.
23. *PR.*, i, p. 42.
24. *PR.*, i, pp. 36–9.
25. *Hist. of Phil.*, i, p. 79: 'Mysteries are in their nature speculative; mysterious certainly to the understanding, but not to the reason; they are rational, just in the sense of being speculative.' At a certain level of thought no doubt mystery can be accepted, since a *Vorstellung* may well contain mysterious elements, and even rational theology is not free of it. But it is for speculative thinking to resolve such *aporia* by 'seeing through' the mystery and revealing its intrinsic rationality and perspicuity. Cf. *PR.*, ii, p. 283.
26. 'Innocence . . . is, in fact, the condition of the natural consciousness, but it must be done away with as soon as the consciousness of the Spirit actually appears. What it represents is eternal history (*ewige Geschichte*), and the nature of man' (*PR.*, ii, p. 201; *J.*, XVI, p. 74).
27. *PR.*, iii, p. 93.
28. *PR.*, iii, p. 113; *J.*, XVI, p. 320.
29. *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 338.
30. See E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1955) pp. 89–99 (also notes, pp. 718–25).
31. J. N. Findlay goes so far as to suggest that Hegel is 'in a sense the most Christian of thinkers, for while the official defenders of Christianity have usually borrowed their logic and the cast of their thought from Aristotle or from other sources, Hegel alone among thinkers has borrowed the whole cast of his thought from Christianity' (*Hegel: a Re-examination* [1958] p. 354. Cf. G. R. G. Mure, 'Hegel, Luther and the Owl of Minerva' (*Philosophy*, XLI, 1966, 127): 'Too little attention is now paid to the peculiar influence of his personal religion on Hegel's mature philosophical speculation.')
32. *Speeches on Religion*, trans. J. Oman (Harper Torchbook ed.) pp. 213, 217. 'The whole of religion', says Schleiermacher, 'is nothing but the sum of all the relations of man to God, apprehended in all the possible ways in which any man can be immediately conscious in his life' (ibid.). Again: 'As long as we are men every man has greater receptiveness for some religious experiences and feelings than for others' (p. 218).
33. The Heidelberg philologist Friedrich Creuzer had in 1810–12 published his influential *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, in which he advanced the view that religious myths are really symbols of theological doctrines or moral principles, and that it is as such that they are properly to be interpreted. Creuzer and Hegel were for a time colleagues at Heidelberg.
34. *PR.*, ii, p. 330; *J.*, XVI, p. 193.
35. *PR.*, iii, p. 96.
36. *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 432.
37. Ibid., p. 436.

38. In much of what he says Hegel recalls Lessing's ideas in *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*. But whereas Lessing maintains that 'revelation gives nothing to the human species, which human reason left to itself might not attain', Hegel believes that 'manifest religion' is a necessary means to such knowledge, and that the religious life of mankind will continue even when philosophical reason has already done its work of transposing truth to the plane of the speculative intellect. Nevertheless, the ambiguity in Hegel's use of the term *offenbare Religion* is difficult to eliminate.

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Index

- Absolute, the, xiv, 27, 29, 36f, 46, 58, 65, 80, 84, 94, 97, 98, 100, 103, 105, 135, 137, 139
- Absolute Religion, *see* Christianity
- Adonis, 49
- Ahriman, 48f
- alienation, 68, 69, 70
- Ananke (Fate), 56
- Anselm, St, 97f
- anthropomorphism, 50, 55, 59
- Apollo, 55
- argument *e consensu gentium*, 88
- Aristotle, 135
- Art, relation of religion to, 37
- Atonement, Christ's, 106, 112, 115
- Aufgehoben* (*Aufhebung*), 57, 103, 129
- Aufklärung* (Enlightenment), 5, 12, 39, 76, 83, 112, 116, 117
- authority in religion, 11f, 60f, 72f, 74f, 76
- Baptism, 72
- Begriff* (concept), 33f, 38, 58, 61, 63f, 105, 116, 129
- Bible, 62f, 74, 105, 109f, 118
- Böhme, J., 39
- Brahman, 44f, 48
- Buddhism, 46–8
- Catholicism, 20, 75, 76, 121, 138
- Chinese religion, 42f
- Christ, Jesus, 18f, 70ff, 72, 75, 106, 115, 121, 131
- Christian theism, 101, 137, 107f
- Christianity, 38, 39, 48, 51, ch. 4 *passim*, 101, 103f, 117, 121f, 130
- church, 16f, 18f, 66, 71–6, 111, 121
- church and state, relation of, 9f, 21, 73, 138
- concept, *see* *Begriff*
- Confucius, 43
- contingency, 91ff
- cosmological argument, 91–4
- creation, 52, 68
- creeds, 111
- Creuzer, F., 140
- Descartes, 98, 135
- dialectic, 36f, 129, 138f; *see also* Reason¹
- divine attributes, 86
- dogma, Christian, 65–71, 73, 110, 112, 121, 136f, 140
- dualism, 48f, 130
- Eckhart, Meister, 130
- education, religious, 10f, 73, 125
- Egyptian religion, 49f
- election, 54
- Enlightenment, *see* *Aufklärung*
- Erdmann, J. E., 136
- ethics, communal (*Sittlichkeit*), 73
 - personal (*Moralität*), 73
- eucharist, 72

- events, revelation through, 105,
109, 113, 115
evil, 69f, 114
- Faith, 11, 26f, 66, 75, 78, 80, 83
fall of man, 69, 114, 139
Fatherhood of God, 66
feeling in religion, 31f, 79, 81f, 117,
127, 132
Feuerbach, L. A., 136
Fortuna publica, 56
freedom, 42, 51, 55, 64, 69, 75,
108, 122, 138
- Gabler, G. A., 136
God, in Judaism, 52—4
 proofs of existence of, 62, 78,
 79, 87, 88—99
 self-consciousness of in man, 58,
 101, 138
Goethe, 132
Göschl, R. F., [1
Greek religion (religion of beauty),
54—6
- Hamann, 132
Hegel, G. W. F., life of, xif
 *Encyclopaedia of the Philo-
 sophical Sciences*, xii, 34, 134f
 *Lectures on the History of
 Philosophy*, 135
 *Lectures on the Philosophy of
 History*, 65, 130f
 *Lectures on the Philosophy of
 Religion*, xii, xvii, 65, 137
 'Life of Jesus', 4ff
 Phenomenology of Spirit, xi, 23,
 135
 'Positivity of the Christian
 Religion', 6—12
 'The Spirit of Christianity',
 12—21
- Henning, L. von, 136
Herder, 132
Herodotus, 41
Hinduism, 43—6
 'trinity' in, 45, 128
Holy Spirit, 65, 66, 74
- Idea (*Idée*), 36, 37, 61, 63ff, 67, 68,
99, 102
- immanence (total), *see* pantheism
immortality, 56f, 79, 136, 137f
Incarnation, the, 70ff, 106
Intuition (immediacy), 77—82, 84f,
87, 88f, 133
- Jacobi, F. H., 26, 79—81, 82ff, 85,
88, 89, 95
Jesus, 4—9, 13—19, 21
Judaism (religion of sublimity), 7,
12ff, 52—4
- Kant, xiii, 4, 6, 11, 12, 14f, 19, 22,
26, 78ff, 81, 83, 91, 94, 96,
97, 99, 117, 125, 134
Kingdom of God, 15ff, 72, 74
- Lasson, G., 139
Leibniz, 98, 135
Lessing, 114, 132, 141
Logos-concept, 74
love, 14f, 17—20, 66, 68, 126
Luther, 122
- Magic, 41, 43
Marheineke, P. K., 136
Marx, K., 137
mediation, in knowledge of God,
86f
 of Spirit in nature and man,
 86f, 99, 104
- Mendelssohn, M., 12, 13
Michelet, C. L., 136
miracle, 52f, 61, 62, 76, 106, 109
monism, 46
myth, 49, 121
- Natural religion, *see* religion of
nature
- Old Testament, 52f, 54
ontological argument, 92, 97—9
Ormazd, 48f
Osiris, 50
- Pantheism (religion of substance),
42, 101—4, 130, 138f
Parmenides, 101
particular, *see* universal and
particular
personality (divine), 52, 55, 114

- philosophy, in relation to religion,
 xivff, 31–5, 113–19
 philosophy of religion, beginnings
 of, xiii, 77
 polytheism, 4, 50, 57
 Poseidon, 55
 positivity in religion, 60f
 priesthood, Christian, 75
 proof, kinds of, 90f
 Protestantism, 75f, 118, 138

 Reason (*Vernunft*), 4, 11, 35f, 67
 reconciliation (*Versöhnung*), 14f,
 38, 64, 65, 68, 69f, 114
 life as principle of, 21f
 love as principle of, 15
 Reformation, the, 75, 122
 religion
 and philosophy, xivff, 31–5,
 61, 74
 and the secular world, 29ff
 as social, 28f
 of beauty, *see* Greek religion
 of nature, 38–50
 of spiritual individuality, 39,
 50–7, 130
 of sublimity, *see* Judaism
 of substance, *see* Pantheism
 of utility, *see* Roman religion
 revealed (*offenbare Religion*),
 58, 59, 60, 104–13, 133, 141
 religions, diversity of, 119–22
 religious consciousness, 24ff
 knowledge, pre-reflective, 78,
 85, 87
 resurrection of body, 49, 50, 114
 of Jesus, 18f, 115
 Roman religion (religion of utility),
 56f
 Rosenkrantz, K., 136

 Sacraments, Christian, 72
 salvation, 28
 Schaller, J., 136
 Schelling, F. W. J., xi, 22, 101, 135,
 138
 Schleiermacher, F. D. E., 60, 79,
 81ff, 84, 113, 120
 Shiva, 45
 Siger of Brabant, 116

 Sin, 53, 69, 131
 original, 114
 Socrates, 8
 Sonship (of Christ), 66
 Spinoza, 101, 102f, 138f
 Spirit (*Geist*), 37, 40, 47f, 49, 50f,
 52, 57, 58f, 60, 64, 66, 68,
 72, 97, 100, 120, 121, 126,
 137
 Spiritual Community, *see* church
 Stirner, Max, 136, 137
 Strauss, D. F., 136
 subjectivity, 50, 51, 54, 130
 substance (nature), 42, 44, 47, 48,
 51
 Syrian religion, 49

 teleological argument, 94–7
 Teleology, meaning of, 95f
 theology, historical, 111
 theology, liberal, 63, 65, 106, 112
 theriomorphism, 50
 T'ien (heaven), 42
 Tillich, P., 130
 tradition, Christian, 110f
 Trinity, dogma of, 66ff, 112, 114,
 121, 131
 truth, double, 116
 Typhon, 50

 Understanding (*Verstand*), 35, 65,
 67, 83, 107
 universal and particular, 48, 50, 59,
 66, 131

 Vatke, W., 136
 Vedas, 44
Versöhnung, *see* reconciliation
 Vishnu, 45
Volksreligion, 2f, 20, 54
Vorstellung (representation), 32f,
 34, 37, 66, 103f, 105, 107,
 114, 116

 Wolff, C., 98, 135
 Worship, 27f

 Zeus, 55
 roastrianism, 48f